**TECHNO-WIZARDS AND DESPAIRING DRAGONS: ON MAGIC, CHAOS, AND ACEDIA**

**IN MODERN MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY**

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**<u>DEDICATION</u>**

To everyone on Earth and in Heaven who has been part of my theological training. From the earliest Christians who prayed for me though they knew me not to my parents who took me to church to the community at Wheaton College – especially the Graham House – to my current community at Saint Louis University and everyone else in-between.

To Cyrus, Phoebe, and Beth: my sun, my moon, my home.

**<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The following dissertation is an attempt to do three things. First, it is an attempt to show that the modern techno-scientific project, what some such as Gerald P. McKenny have dubbed the "Baconian project," is enchanted and rooted in myth and magic at least when it comes to modern medical technology and the project's understanding of the role of religious practices in personal health. To this end, I have chosen to focus on transhumanism as an example of enchantment in medical technology. Second, it is an attempt to give the beginning of an explanation, in addition to those offered by various authors surveyed below, for why myth and magic persist in these areas of the techno-scientific project, if not the project as a whole. Finally, it is an attempt to show that given these enchantments the techno-scientific project have serious if not intractable conflicts with what could be called a broad Christian orthodoxy.

In this introduction, I will do three things. First, I will give an explanation of what I mean by transhumanism. Unlike the other two key concepts in this work, magic and acedia, I do not offer a detailed explanation of transhumanism in any of the articles forming the body of this work. Second, I will introduce the concept of the disenchantment thesis and the challenged posed to it by Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm. Third, I will survey prior work on the history of Christianity and technology, especially as it pertains to transhumanism, in order to situate my own work in the field. Finally, I will give a brief overview of each article and the rationale for choosing the articles that I did.

Transhumanism: A Brief Introduction

Strictly speaking transhumanism refers to the project aimed at bringing about the posthuman, beings that are related to but distinct from humans as humans are from our troglodytic ancestors. Transhumanists are the people working to bring this goal to fruition, and they come from a variety of backgrounds. Within the academy, there are transhumanists in every discipline from anthropology to zoology. A transhuman is a being that exists between the current human and the posthuman as a sort of evolutionary bridge.

However, there are shades of difference between the various transhumanists groups. Differences over what should or will constitute the posthuman, which technologies should be pursued, which values to promote, and how to bring about the posthuman at a societal level. Further complicating matters, there are groups that are related to, but not always described as, transhumanist. Groups like the "immortalists," people who do not want to change anything about humanity other than the fact that we die, and the Russian Cosmists, an Orthodox Christian philosophical and technological movement discussed below, that are at times portrayed as a religious counterpart to transhumanism that is portrayed as secular. Complicating things still further, "posthuman" can also refer to the push to do away with anthropocentricism.

In the following "posthuman" refers strictly to a future being that had its origins in humanity and was brought into being at least in part by the power of human technology. "Transhumanism" and its related words are used in a general sense to refer to any project that wants to radically alter the being of humans through the use of technology to such a degree that our bodies and minds become fundamentally different than they are now. Unless

otherwise stated, transhumanism does not particularly refer to secular transhumanism but also includes religious transhumanism. Drawing fine distinctions between various transhumanist and related groups may be important in other contexts, but doing so is not necessary in this work, so for simplicity's sake I will use "transhumanism" as a catchall for various human enhancement projects.

<div align="center">Disenchantment and the Myth of Its Existence</div>

The transhumanists are seeking immortality, yet we live in a society that scoffs at Ponce de León for supposedly seeking out the Fountain of Youth.[1] Scientific research – especially on religious practices – can become a magical practice, yet we look askew at people who claim to practice magic. After all, we are modern men and women, and we know that we have purged all myths and magic from our thinking – even many of the religionists amongst us. At least that is what common retellings of the "disenchantment thesis" that was popularized by Max Weber claim. The thesis, variously nuanced by different scholars, argues that at some point in the past the West switched from an enchanted understanding of the world, an understanding filled with myth and magic, to a disenchanted one devoid of such things.

Many scholars point to Copernicus, Galileo, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton and the birth of modern natural science as the time of disenchantment.[2] Some point to more recent times to Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, in fact those men actively portrayed themselves as disenchanters. Still others, like Martin Heidegger, go further back to the beginning of Hellenistic

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[1] Although he should be ridiculed for thinking it would be in Florida of all places.
[2] E.g. Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957).
Manuel Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

philosophy and what could be staked as the beginning of Western thought.[3] Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm has made a strong intervention in this debate with his book *The Myth of Disenchantment.* In brief, he has argued that the disenchantment thesis is itself a myth, and that the West is still every bit as enchanted as it ever was.[4]

Josephson-Storm's argument has three movements. First, he details how, on an empirical level, the disenchantment thesis is simply wrong. Marshalling forth recent survey data, he shows that in the so-called disenchanted West believes in magic, psychic powers, and other paranormal occurrences and entities, such as ghosts, along with what would be considered more typically mainstream religious beliefs such as belief in a god of some sort.[5] Thus, empirically speaking, we as a society are far from disenchanted.

In his second move, Joseph-Storm's begins to show disenchantment is not just false on empirical grounds but that the development of our so-called disenchanted age was itself enchanted. He begins by showing the entangled development of our concepts of science, magic, and religion. For example, Francis Bacon's project was not done in opposition to religion or even magic, per se. Instead, science was a means to purge religion of superstition by which Bacon meant demonic magic or magic not based in reason.[6] Magic was reinvented, not totally disenchanted. Thus, Bacon did not set out to overthrow religion or even magic but to use science as tool for religious purposes, and his project of using science and religion to suppress

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[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008). Also, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2nd ed, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014)

[4] Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1-11.

[5] Ibid. 23-34.

[6] Ibid. 44-51

superstition was picked up by subsequent scientists and philosophes. Josephson-Storm then

shows a similar pattern of in other fields besides the natural sciences that are often claimed to

be sources of disenchantment: German idealism, social sciences, religious studies,

psychoanalysis, critical theory, and logical positivism. At any given moment of supposed

disenchantment, enchanted concepts and practices survived not simply out of stubbornness or

ignorance, but because these various enchantments were sources and necessary parts of the

"disenchanting" project.

The third move Josephson-Storm makes is to show how the enchanted elements of

modernity became occluded. The history of magic and science faded into memory, and most

people simply do not know that the likes of Bacon and Newton believed in magic albeit a

rational magic purified of all demonic elements. Yet, he claims that the occult played an

important role in the development of even more recent projects like psychoanalysis and critical

theory/poststructuralism. However, in the case of psychoanalysis, Freud suppressed his

sympathies for the occult at the urging of Ernst Jones out of fear that psychoanalysis would be

dismissed as pseudoscience similar to Christian Science.[7] As for critical

theory/poststructuralism, the occultism of Ludwig Klages had an immense influence on Walter

Benjamin and through Benjamin almost all subsequent major figures in that field. Yet, as

Josephson-Storm suggests, Klages's influence was largely downplayed, ignored, and forgotten

for a number of reasons chief of which was his raging anti-Semitism, a position that he ramped

up during Hitler's rise to power. Thus, for reasons deliberate and accidental, the various

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[7] Ibid. 200-201

survivals of enchantment in Western science and philosophy have disappeared from view, but persist in their subterranean structures.

As Josephson-Storm concludes his work, part of the problem with the popular interpretation of Weber's disenchantment thesis is a translation error. Weber said that the world was in the process of being disenchanted not that it was already disenchanted.[8] The question then is no longer whether or not the world is disenchanted but whether or not it is possible to disenchant the world. Given the history of the development of (post)modernity and the various disciplines that comprise the modern academy, I would venture that it is impossible to fully disenchant the world because as Josephson-Storm argues the repression of enchantments is also the way in which enchantments survive. The task then is to find the ways that myth and magic, or at least a magical mindset as described in the next chapter, still exist and grapple with the implications.

As reliant as I am on Josephson-Storm for framing my argument, I accept his thesis with one addendum, which requires some explaining. In trying to show why it is that we do not recognize the human sciences as enchanted practices, Josephson-Storm makes the borderline conspiratorial claim that the progenitors of contemporary science and critical theory, especially Freud and Jung, deliberately suppressed and repressed the enchanted nature of their fields in order to gain wide spread acceptance.[9] Now, I have penchant for conspiracy theories, so I again agree with Josephson-Storm, but I also agree because Peter Harrison has shown that the creation of the modern categories of science and religion were politically influenced, which in

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[8] Ibid. 277-281
[9] Ibid. 191-206.

turn means it should not be surprising that some philosophers and scientists covered up their

sympathies for things like astral projection, divination, and necromancy in order to make their

burgeoning fields seem more respectable.[10]

The addendum I want to make, then, is that this obfuscation of the myth, magic, the

occult, the spooky, and all other things fantastical in the development and practice of the

sciences has been enabled in large part by our collective passive nihilism that is tied up with the

widespread sin of acedia in our present society. In making that claim, I am reliant in part on

Nolen Gertz's recent work demonstrating the nihilism that is inherent in our relationship to

modern technology.[11] As will be explored in more depth, modern techno-science remains

enchanted in part because we simply receive the contemporary orthodoxy regarding

technology and science without questioning that orthodoxy. Additionally, these enchantments

are part of the reason why we are nihilists in the first place. Our relationship with techno-

science goes something like the following. Techno-science presents us with a vision of the

world as chaotic that scares us causing us to despair. Then, it tells us that it alone can save us

from this chaos through technological control, and we dare not question its claims because of

the despair it has engendered.

<p style="text-align:center">Literature Review</p>

Now, I will briefly survey some of the work that has been done in showing the

relationship between science and religion in regards to the pursuit of human perfection namely

in the form of transhumanism. My focus in this survey is on human perfection for three

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[10] Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 83-116.
[11] Nolen Gertz, *Nihilism and Technology* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

reasons. One, transhumanism, more so than any other current movement, expresses the true aim of the modern techno-scientific medical complex. Two, it is also the current in scientific research that most obviously deals in mythmaking. Three, the presence of magic in research is tied up with the understanding of causation regnant amongst scientists and is by extension implicitly covered by the readings on transhumanism.

Common critiques of modern technology echo the disenchantment thesis, if they do not directly repeat it. These critiques go something like the following: although humans have always made use of various forms of technology, something changed along the way such that our current technologies are somehow different, which in turn means that modern life is radically different. Such is more of less the claim of both Martin Heidegger, who identified the problem of modern technology as the latest and most powerful instantiation of ontotheology, and Jacques Ellul, who identified the problem as the modern fixation on efficiency.[12]

While Heidegger gives a phenomenological account and Ellul a sociological one, others have given theological accounts. McKenny in *To Relieve the Human Condition* argues that the roots of modern technology and medicine are in Protestant Christianity. Looking back at Francis Bacon, McKenny claims that Protestant Christianity during Bacon's time held that salvation was not attainable through any human effort and one's efforts should be focused on meeting the needs of one's neighbors.[13] With Bacon, "It became clear that effectiveness [in meeting the

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[12] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings,* ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964): 23-63.
[13] Gerald P. McKenny, *To Relieve the Human Condition: Bioethics, Technology, and the Body* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 17.
In his book McKenny is drawing on the work of Charles Taylor and modifying it to fit the story of modern medicine, so readers familiar with Taylor's work will notice some similarities.

needs of one's neighbors] would require an instrumental approach to nature, ultimately including human nature, in order to fulfill its moral project," a project that McKenny dubs "the Baconian Project."[14] Hence Bacon's famed cry that the end of the new science should be, "to relieve and benefit the condition of man," which for Baconian medicine means the cure of disease and the prolongation of life.[15] McKenny then goes on to demonstrate how "to relieve and benefit the condition of man" came to relieve humans of being human through things like physician assisted suicide, euthanasia, or transhumanism.

Brent Waters tells much of the same story as McKenny, but with an added emphasis on fin de siècle developments in science and philosophy in his book *From Human to Posthuman*. Waters traces the shift from a providential understanding of the world, typified in Augustine's *City of God*, to the idea of progress.[16] Unlike McKenny who then moves to discuss the idea of progress in the contemporary medical setting, Waters then describes the change from a belief in progress to a belief in process brought about by the realization that the fruits of progress were not shared by all. This shift, coupled with Darwin showing the supposed chaotic reality of the natural world and Freud doing the same for the interior world, led to the creation of what Water's calls "postmodern technologies," technologies that seek to create order out of a chaotic world by transforming it rather than utilizing an orderly world as earlier technologies did.[17] Eventually, the belief in process turned these technologies towards the human body, and now the goal is the transformation of the human body.

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[14] McKenny, 17-18.
[15] Ibid., 18.
[16] Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 1-11.
[17] Ibid. 47-68.

Neither McKenny nor Waters pin the blame for the problem of modern technology

generally or transhumanism particularly on Christianity. Reading Waters, one gets the sense

that the shifts in thinking he describes all happened outside of Christianity. McKenny, for his

part, identifies a form of Protestant Christianity to blame, but he depicts the Baconian project

in such a way that it very quickly sheds all of its Christian-ness other than a misdirected desire

to love one's neighbor that dissolves into a kind of sentimentality. To be sure, they both

recognize that Christians were the first modern Western scientists and that certain Christian

doctrines encouraged the development of the modern techno-scientific project. However, on

both of their accounts the kind of Christianity that drove the early stages of technological

progress was easily purged of any specifically Christian doctrinal content, such that it could be

easily "secularized."

Here some Roman Catholics of the triumphalist variety may gloat that the issues with

the development of technology and the modern infatuation with it are just two more examples

of the failure of Protestantism. However, as David F. Noble shows in *The Religion of Technology*

the seeds of the reification of technology were sown in Christian theology well before any of

the various Protestant reformations occurred.[18] Per Noble's account, the beginning of modern

technology can be traced back to Benedict of Nursia elevating and dignifying the practical arts

and manual labor as important means to spiritual growth alongside liturgical prayer and *lectio*

*divina*. The result was a sort of early industrial revolution with the development of wind and

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[18] David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).
By "reformations" I mean any of the attempts at reforming the Roman Church that ended with a breaking of fellowship. Using the capitalized Reformation to try and speak of such a varied set of movements that gave rise to Protestantism, seems in my estimation, to be unhelpful and obscures more than it clarifies.

watermills as well as new agricultural methods most notably the heavy plow. During this time

of flourishing for the Benedictines, John Scotus Erigena – who coined the term "mechanical

arts" – linked the pursuit of greater technological mastery to an eschatology that consisted of

the restoration of the *imago Dei*, both spiritually and physically. Hugh of St. Victor was deeply

influenced by Erigena, and he would in turn influence the likes of Bonaventure, Duns Scotus,

and Albertus Magnus thus establishing and normalizing the use of technology to reestablish a

prelapsarian humanity that was both spiritually and physically perfected.[19] A few centuries after

Erigena, the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon would couple the pursuit of technological perfection

with the millenarian eschatology of Joachim of Fiore such that technological progression then

became a means by which humans aid God in ushering in His kingdom on Earth.[20] Noble then

shows the influence of this project in Catholic Spain and other parts of Catholic Europe before

arriving in Protestant England where it is picked up by Francis Bacon, Newton, and others.[21] The

objective of Noble's work is to show the influence of Christian eschatology on contemporary

technological projects (space exploration, artificial intelligence, and human enhancement), but

his project is also useful for showing that the roots of modern technology and its relationship to

Christianity extend back much further than the Reformation. Finally, it should be noted that

while Noble's work is written for a more popular rather than academic audience, his account of

modern technology having Christian, especially Franciscan roots, dovetails with John Milbank's

account of the origin of Modernity and secular humanism in *Theology and Social Theory*.[22]

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[19] Ibid., 9-20.
[20] Ibid., 21-42.
[21] Ibid., 43-56.
[22] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): XXV-XXIX.

Thus, the problem of modern technology is the problem of Western Christianity as a whole not just Protestantism, or more soberly, the problem of modern technology has grown out of elements of both Catholicism and Protestantism. If some Catholics would still demur that "real" Catholicism has had nothing to do with our current situation, then it should be noted that one of the greatest influences on contemporary speculation in regards to technology, both secular and Christian, is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who cast a vision of humanity progressing with the aid of technology to a cosmic consciousness that would lead to our merging with all things and with Christ who would be in all things. Before anyone utters "heretic," Teilhard has had something of a rehabilitation since the days his books were on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum and his condemnation was a subject of discussion at the Second Vatican Council (seven years after his death).[23] By the end of the council his reputation had been so repaired, thanks no doubt in large part to the efforts of his Jesuit confrère Henri de Lubac, that Joseph Ratzinger would complain that *Gaudium et Spes* relied too much on Teilhard and not enough on Martin Luther in terms of its optimism regarding the state of fallen humanity.[24] However, little over a decade later then Cardinal Ratzinger would cite Teilhard approvingly in *The Spirit of the Liturgy,* again in the second edition of *Introduction to Christianity*, and yet again years later in a vespers address as Pope Benedict XVI.[25] Likewise, Pope Francis and even some cardinals

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[23] Gerard O'Connell, "Will Pope Francis remove the Vatican's 'warning' from Teilhard de Chardin's writings?," *America*, November 21, 2017, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/11/21/will-pope-francis-remove-vaticans-warning-teilhard-de-chardins-writings, accessed April 1, 2020.
Aaron Riches, "Henri de Lubac and the Second Vatican Council," in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 132-133.
[24] John L. Allen, Jr., "World Youth Day: Benedict XVI on the road; WYD's importance; ecumenical and interfaith opportunities: Protestant; Jewish; Muslim," http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/word081205.htm#protestant, accessed April 1, 2020.
[25] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), loc. 260-270, Kindle.
Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), loc. 2840-2865, Kindle.

considered to be more conservative minded like Avery Dulles would do the same.[26] Although,

with Francis and Dulles, it could very well be a Jesuit plot. Thus, Federico Lombardi could claim

a decade ago that, "By now, no one would dream of saying that [Teilhard] is a heterodox author

who shouldn't be studied."[27] That all being said, Teilhard still held views that are deeply

troubling and is well deserving of being called "a flatterer to modernity."[28]

Just as Catholics cannot place the blame solely on Protestants, Eastern Christians cannot

claim that the forgoing is just another example of the Latins being wrong because the influence

of technology has long been at work in the heartland of Pravoslavic Christianity. This influence

has come about in part because of the Soviet adoption of a Marxist understanding of

technology that is at bottom no different than the Western capitalistic understanding that is

now regnant. That Marxism and Sovietism's understanding of technology was no different than

Western capitalism's understanding of technology was one of the great insights of Ellul who

demonstrated that Marx and the Soviets were just as enamored with technology as the

capitalists, and the difference between the two camps were their understandings of which

political and economic system maximized efficiency.[29] In addition to Marxism, there has also

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John L. Allen, Jr., "Pope cites Teilhardian vision of the cosmos of the cosmos as a 'living host,'" *National Catholic Reportter*, July 28, 2009, https://www.ncronline.org/news/pope-cites-teilhardian-vision-cosmos-living-host, accessed April 1, 2020.

[26] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, f.n. 53, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed April 1, 2020.
Avery Dulles, *Eucharistic Church: The Vision of John Paul II*, November 10, 2004, video, https://www.library.fordham.edu/digital/collection/Dulles/id/14, accessed April 1, 2020.

[27] Allen, ""Pope cites Teilhardian vision of the cosmos of the cosmos as a 'living host."

[28] Canadian philosopher George Grant called Teilhard heterodox, because the latter man could only see in the creation of the atom bomb and the destruction of his Christian siblings in Nagasaki a glimmer of a future in which humanity would transcend its current limits.
George Grant, *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 44.

[29] Ellul, 183-228.
Admittedly there is an alternative way to reading Marx on technology. According to the Accelerationists – a subset of libidinal Marxists – Marx was proposing the advancement of technology as a way of bringing about the

been the influence of Russian Cosmism, which is a religious movement that antedates the

Soviets. To put it succinctly, Cosmism is a religious-philosophical movement that attempts to

synthesize developments in modern science and technology with Eastern Orthodox theology,

but it is an immanatized vision with little of the contemplative spirituality that is the treasure of

the Eastern churches.

The founder of Cosmism was the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Fydorov, and he

was one of the first people to propose using technology for resurrecting the dead as well as

radical life extension, physical immortality, and other changes to humanity that are now

understood to be part of the broader transhumanist project. His work went on to influence

much of Russian science in the first half of the 20th century, most notably the Soviet space

program. George M. Young succinctly gives the history of this movement in *The Russian

Cosmists*, and John Gray and Anya Bernstein each show the ways in which Cosmism has

stretched its influence.[30] As Gray tells it, H.G. Wells visited Russia shortly after the Bolshevik

Revolution when Cosmism would have been taking on a more Soviet flavor. Wells returned to

England impressed, and Cosmism made a lasting impact on his work.[31] While it may seem odd

to mention a science fiction writer, it is actually of importance because Wells is a grandfather of

science fiction and science fiction wields an immense power over scientist and technologists

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destruction of capitalism and the ushering in of communism. For more on this position see: Robin Mackay and
Armen Avanessian, "Introduction," in *#Accelerate: An Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin MacKay and Armen
Avanessian (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media, 2014), 1-50.

[30] George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2012).

[31] John Gray, *The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death* (New York: Farrar,
Straus and Giroux, 2011), 104-140.

especially those involved in human enhancement projects.[32] In *The Future of Immortality*, Anya

Bernstein shows the lasting impact of Cosmism on Russian society, despite the disapproval of

the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, and how Cosmism has extended its reach beyond

Russia via the influence of leaders in the tech industries.[33]

Today, it seems that Christians of all stripes are little different than their non-Christian

neighbors in their reception of technology. In regards to technology and the human body, there

are even some who go so far as to claim the mantle of Christian Transhumanism. Some of these

figures are academics like Ron Cole-Turner and Ted Peters. However, some of the biggest and

most influential advocates of transhumanism are not found on theology faculties but the

Internet. Figures like Presbyterian minister Christopher Benek, and Micah Redding the founder

of the Christian Transhumanist Association. On their websites as well as in popular publications

throughout the Internet, one can hear echoes of the two Bacons—Roger and Francis—with

notes of Fydorov and Teilhard: raise the dead, gain immortality, establish the Kingdom, and

merge with Christ through the power of technology.

My task in the following chapters is not to give another account of the rise of modern

science, technology, medicine and their relationship to Christianity. I will also not be developing

a philosophy or theology of technology. Instead, my aim is to suggest that there are some pre-

Christian and anti-Christian enchantments that have carried into at least some areas of science,

technology, and medicine. It is precisely the anti-Christian nature of these enchantments that

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[32] Joshua Raulerson, *Singularities: Technoculture, Transhumanism, and Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 3-26.

[33] Anya Bernstein, *The Future of Immortality: Remaking Life and Death in Contemporary Russia* (Princetion: Princeton University Press, 2019), 152-164.
Bernstein's work covers various groups seeking immortality in addition to the Cosmists, but even though some groups are not Cosmists in the strict sense, Fydorov's influence is still present.

makes the projects they are a part of incompatible with Christianity. Additionally, instead of encouraging faith, hope, and love, these ever ancient ever new enchantments encourage fear, despair, and a disordered desire for control.

<center>Articles: Summary and Rationale</center>

The first article (Chapter 2) is "Simon Says: On the Magical Impulse of Studies on the Efficacy of Intercessory Prayer." Originally written as an argument against Christians conducting studies on the efficacy of prayer, this essay shows the magical thinking that takes place when researchers try to empirically study the effects of Divine-human interactions. This article also highlights the commonalities between magic and science particularly in their development and understanding of causation. Whereas the dangers of transhumanism are a threat to all people, the dangers of magical thinking in science is really only a danger to Christians, and this essay should serve as a warning to Christians that they must be careful in adopting modern scientific understandings of causation especially in regards to their religious practices. Most importantly for the purposes of this project, "Simon Says" gets at the human drive for control. We desire control over nature as demonstrated by technological marvels like hydroelectric dams, but as the studies on prayer reveal, this desire for control also extends to the metaphysical and supernatural realms. Moreover, the use of magic to control forces beyond the physical and natural world to serve human ends is an ancient practice.

Control is sought because, as I argue in the second article (Chapter 3) "From the Waters of Babylon: *Frankenstein*, Transhumanism, and Cosmogony," the universe per modern techno-science is fundamentally chaotic and hostile to humanity. In that article, I am focused on transhumanism, and I argue that the ancient mythological motif of *Chaoskampf* lies behind

modern day transhumanism. I show how the motif leads to an ontology of violence and then

briefly sketch how that ontology has come down to us in the form of techno-scientific power. In

order to help elucidate my point and to show how the myth has transformed in our age, I offer

a reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a retelling of the *Chaoskampf*. While there is much

overlap with Bishop's work on transhumanism, I go further back in history than Bishop to show

that the ontology of transhumanism has a much more ancient and pagan origin.[34] Finally, I

propose the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the ontology of love that it sets up as a starting

point for non-violent technological progress.

In the last article (Chapter 4), "A Thousand and One Thebaidian Noons: Transhumanism

and Acedia," I offer a tentative reason for the modern desire for control and radical

transformation of humanity – acedia. Many critics of transhumanism argue that transhumanism

is fueled by pride, hubris, and vanity. However, as I argue in this article acedia is one of the

besetting sins of transhumanism and a Christian understanding of transhumanism is incomplete

without considering the role acedia plays in the transhumanist movement. One of the driving

forces just beneath the surface of transhumanism is a kind of despair, or even fear, that

ultimately sins against faith, hope, and charity, and is a further reason to question the

desirability of a Christian transhumanism. I begin by drawing on ancient accounts of acedia in

order to offer a working definition of acedia. Then, I trace how acedia has come down to our

present time in the form of passive nihilism. After that, I offer examples of acedia amongst

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[34] Bishop, like Waters and McKenny, traces the origins of transhumanism back to the beginnings of Modernity and shifts in thought brought about by developments in the natural sciences. See Jeffrey P. Bishop, ""

leading transhumanist figures. Finally, following John Cassian, I offer the virtue of courage as the antidote to acedia and Christ as a model of the kind of courage that counters acedia.

"A Thousand and One Thebaidian Noons" is the last essay and the linchpin for two reasons. One, the section on nihilism and acedia is especially important for understanding how the repression that Josephson-Storm claims happened could become so widespread and enduring with seemingly few people noticing or caring. Since we are passive nihilists, that is we are a people who do not care especially when it comes to thinking and choosing for ourselves, we receive the values of society without critically evaluating them – the transvaluaton spoken of by Nietzsche. Passive nihilism is as common in the sciences as it is in theology and philosophy and because of the widespread nihilism of our contemporary culture when it comes to science and technology, we do not interrogate the techno-scientific enterprise as deeply as we should. The reason we do not, I think, is because of the closely related problem of acedia, which is a kind of despair for the future. Since we despair for the future, a future filled with death, we turn to technology and science to provide us with the means to one-day escape death and, perhaps, resurrect the dead. Thus, we dare not dig too deep lest we begin to doubt the claims made by our supposedly disenchanted soteriology.

Two, this fear driven despair is the link between the next two chapters. The ancient modern mytho-scientific understanding of the universe as fundamentally chaotic or at the very least dependent on a chaotic element for its creation is terrifying especially at a theological level. What if Baʿal's arm fails this time? What if God becomes a being different than the one revealed in Scripture? Since our existence is tenuous and the future uncertain, we have to in turn devise a way to secure our place in the universe, our continued existence. The ancients

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turned to their magical rites while we turn to science, but the two are more closely related than we like to think as seen in Chapter One. In the conclusion (Chapter 5), I will further synthesize the articles and lay out a plan for future research. I will sketch out the plan to develop "From the Waters of Babylon" into a book. Additionally, I will do the same for "A Thousand and One Thebaidian Noons." As for "Simon Says," I intend to apply the basic claim to other areas of research on the health of effects of various religious practices, especially those of Christians. I am especially keen to examine the work of Harold Koenig.[35] Finally, I will give some suggestions for overcoming the fear and despair provoked by the Chaoskampf ontology.

Between the articles, on either side of Chapter 3, I have included interludes to help show the interconnectedness of the articles on the themes of control (magic), that which needs controlling (chaos), and the fear and despair (acedia) in the face of chaos that encourages the feverish pursuit of means of control over the perceived chaos. Since the articles were originally written years a part on different occasions, the relationship between the articles is not readily apparent, and these interludes will help to clarify that relationship.  These interludes will take the form of reflections with their starting point in Scripture. Interlude One will start with the account of Eve and the Serpent from Gen. 3:1-6, and ponder why it is that humans are constantly seeking to control everything and everyone around them. The answer ventured is fear. Interlude Two will start with  Yahweh's startling declaration to Isaiah that, "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things."[36]  Despite claims I make to the contrary in "From the Waters of Babylon" the world does seem to be chaotic at

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[35] This may be due in part to me wanting to title the paper "You're a Wizard Harry."
[36] Is. 45:7

times.  Thus, even some who believe in a creator God will be tempted to despair along with those who think that the universe is fundamentally chaotic. The difference between the two groups being that the former thinks that the chaotic arbitrary force is a personal one. This chaos (or dark God) in turn pushes us to despair and desire greater control over our lives.

It is my sincere hope that the following pages will not only show some of the myth and magic in modern techno-science, but also push back against the climate of fear in our late modern world. Put differently, it is my hope that the following pages are ultimately a declaration of the gospel of faith, hope, and love over against the fear that has so long gripped humanity. We may be more "advanced" than all those who came before us, but our basic motivations and pathologies have not changed. Therefore, the gospel is as necessary now as ever.

CHAPTER 2: SIMON SAYS[1]

Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." – Acts 8:17–19

Introduction

Empirical studies on the efficacy of intercessory prayer for the healing of the sick have an almost 150-year history. Although the first study was conducted by an agnostic in order to disprove the power of prayer, these studies have often been conducted by well-meaning Christians who desire to prove that prayer works and should be taken seriously by the medical establishment. This was the case with the three most notable studies conducted in recent decades by Robert C. Byrd, William S. Harris et al., and Herbert Benson et al.[2] In their endeavors, these researchers, along with a myriad of others who have conducted less well-known studies, have striven to refine their methodology so that one day we may definitively know whether or not prayer is effective for healing. After all, these studies are scientific, and the grand promise of modern science is that we can eventually come to truly know and understand everything through the gradual refinement of our experiments. However, there is a deep irony at the foundation of empirical studies of intercessory prayer: the more "scientific"

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[1] Benjamin N. Parks, "Simon Says: On the Magical Impulse of Empirical Studies on the Efficacy of Intercessory Prayer," *Christian Bioethics* 25 no. 1 (April 2019): 69-85, https://doi-org.ezp.slu.edu/10.1093/cb/cby020.

[2] Robert C. Byrd, "Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population," *Southern Medical Journal* 81, no. 7 (1988): 826-829.
William S. Harris, et al., "A Randomized, Controlled Trial of the Effects of Remote, Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients Admitted to the Coronary Care Unit," *Internal Medicine* 159, no. 19 (1999): 2273-2279.
Herbert Benson, et al., "Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in Cardiac Bypass Patients: A Multicenter Randomized Trial of Uncertainty and Certainty of Receiving Intercessory Prayer," *American Heart Journal* 151, no. 4 (2006): 941.

they become, the more magical they become, and magic is antithetical to proper Christian

practice. Thus, out of a desire to defend and promote their religion, these well-meaning

researchers wind up participating in something that is contrary to their religion.

In this article, I will argue that the empirical study of the efficacy of intercessory prayer

is magical in its structure and aims and that it requires researchers to believe in magic—

whether they realize it or not. This is not to say that the belief in intercessory prayer is magical

because, as will be shown later, miracle is a distinct category from magic. I will proceed in four

steps. First, I will define magic as an attempt to bring a supernatural force or being, particularly

God, under human control through a specific ritual performed in a specific way. Next, I will give

an overview of the condemnation of magic in Christianity with an emphasis on the Scriptural

account. Then, I will give a brief history of the empirical study of intercessory prayer that will

highlight the development of its magical approach. Finally, I will argue that the studies done on

intercessory prayer and the mindset of the researchers ought to be understood as magical in

their aims and should not be supported by Christian researchers or institutions.

<div align="center">Magic</div>

The first order of business in discussing magic is to define what is meant by magic,

because the word has a multiplicity of meanings. It can refer to illusions performed by conjurers

of cheap tricks.[3] Alternatively, it can be defined as a real force that is not harmful in and of itself

as it is often portrayed in popular culture today, particularly in movies and children's books.

Magic as a fantastical and morally neutral force is, I reckon, the most common popular

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[3] Which Gandalf is adamant that he is not. As he furiously exclaimed at Bilbo in the Peter Jackson film adaptation of The Lord of the Rings, "Do not take me for some conjurer of cheap tricks."

understanding of magic in our culture today.[4] On the occasions that magic itself is portrayed as evil, and not the end to which it is used, it is usually in connection to the demonic, such as the Ouija board in *The Exorcist*.

Academic definitions are not any more precise. As Owen Davies exasperatedly writes, "Defining 'magic' is a maddening task . . . numerous philosophers, anthropologists, historians, and theologians have attempted to pin down its essential meaning, sometimes analyzing it in such complex and abstruse depth that it all but loses its sense altogether."[5] The enormous diversity of magical practices is one obstacle to defining magic. Another and more important obstacle in defining magic is magic's relationships with religion and science because, as some like Richard Kieckhefer have described it, "magic is a crossing-point where religion converges with science."[6]

The connection between the history of magic and the history of religion extends well beyond a mutual belief in the supernatural. The commonly given etymology of "magic" traces the word back to the Greek word magoi used to describe Zoroastrian priests from Persia who spread their practices and teachings westward into the Mediterranean world.[7] Zoroastrianism has a dualistic understanding of the world as being divided between light and dark. In response to this reality, "[b]oth astrology and magic were important as means to gain control over the

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[4] An understanding that one typically goes along with, unless one wants to be pegged as a crazy fundamentalist Christian by condemning both Dumbledore as well as Voldemort as evil because they both use magic.

[5] Owen Davies, *Magic: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

[6] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

[7] Ibid.

human and the celestial worlds, in order to assure blessed destiny for human beings through wresting control from the hostile evil powers."[8]

The intertwining of religion and magic is not exclusive to the Zoroastrians of antiquity, because forms of magic already existed outside of Persia before the magoi headed west, and Zoroastrianism is not the only religion to be intertwined with magical practices. The intertwining of religious and magical practice has even occurred in religions that condemn magic, such as Christianity and Old Testament Yahwism. One example of so-called Christian magic is found in magical papyri from the period of the early church. Magical papyrus as a genre well predates Christianity, and the effectiveness of the given spell, chants, charm, prayer, etc., is dependent on two things: reciting names of divinities to force their co-operation and using forceful orders in commanding the gods. Some papyri from the Christian era use divine names for God in the Old and New Testament in their magical rituals, which in turn has led to these scrolls being referred to as Christian magical papyri.

Of particular note in the "Christian" papyri is the fact that they come out of an explicitly Christian context: they were not written by pagans who decided to incorporate Christian divine names. Instead, the scrolls were written by Christians who for whatever reason thought that magic and Christianity could coexist. Such a development in Christianity and magic might suggest that the relationship between the two is closer than is commonly supposed. That is to say that these magical papyri might suggest that magic is part of proper Christian practice.

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[8] Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 99-100.

However, as Kee points out, on closer examination, the scrolls are not particularly Christian in any conventional sense beyond the use of Christian names for God because:

> It is [magic] which is the dominant feature in this material, since the purpose of the formulae is to coerce the desired results by means of repeating the appropriate words or acts. What is sought is not to learn the will of the deity, but to shape the deity's will to do the bidding of the one making the demand.[9]

Thus, although magic and religion share some basic assumptions such as the existence of supernatural beings and the need for prayer, they part company—at least in the case of the Christian religions—when it comes to the divine-human relationship, because Christians want to be shaped by God's will, whereas magicians want to shape God's will.

Like magic and religion, "Magic and experimental science have been connected in their development . . . magicians were perhaps the first to experiment."[10] The most famous examples are the development of astronomy from astrology and chemistry from alchemy. That science would develop in part out of magic is not surprising, because just as religion and magic share some basic assumptions, so too do science and magic. Two basic assumptions at the heart of both science and magic are: one, that we can learn and understand efficient causal relationships (if x, then y); and two, that once we understand a certain causal relationship, we can deploy that knowledge to manipulate the world around us for human ends.

Put more simply, both magic and science want to grasp power for human control, albeit in different domains. Despite the two being in agreement on causal relationships and the need for experimentation, the two part ways in regards to the domain in which they seek to operate. Science conducts its experiments on the physical world, whereas magic conducts its

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[9] Ibid. 112.
[10] Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Empirical Science*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 2.

experiments on the spiritual. Although both seek to harness power, science—through the

technologies that develop out of it—aims to harness the power of the natural world, whereas

magic—through its various rituals—aims to harness the power of the supernatural.

Thus, magic stands apart from science and religion as a third but not entirely distinct

category. What sets magic apart is its pattern of thinking. As Thorndike describes it, magic is not

"merely a collection of rites and feats," because "until these acts are based upon or related to

some imaginative, purposive, and rational thinking, the doings of early man cannot be

distinguished as either religious or scientific or magical. Beavers build dams . . . but they have

no magic . . . no science or religion. Magic implies a mental state."[11] The magical state of mind

is well described in Kee's summary of what magic is:

> In the realm of magic the basic assumption is that there is a mysterious, inexorable
> network of forces which the initiated can exploit for personal benefit, or block for
> personal protection. These forces have acquired many names. The well-informed will
> utilize the power inherent in those names in order to achieve desired ends. Like the
> operator at the controls of a powerful modern machine, the forces are resident in the
> cosmos. The questions are: Who will use them? For what ends? The magician has at his
> disposal a kind of operator's manual, by means of which he can bend the forces to serve
> his own will . . . There is not in view any overall picture or set of goals . . . There is no
> need to understand the specifics of the powers themselves. Rather, the viewpoint is
> pragmatic: What is it that will make the system work for the purposes of the operator?[12]
> (1986, 123–4)

Magic, as it is understood in the rest of this article, is a way of thinking that manifests in

attempts at manipulating and controlling supernatural forces. At times, the supernatural force

to be manipulated has been identified as the God of the two testaments, as was the case in the

papyri discussed above. Such an identification of the force and attempts to manipulate it are

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[11] Ibid. 4.
[12] Kee, 123-124.

highly problematic for Christians because it is at odds with Scripture and the broad Christian tradition, to both of which I will now turn my attention.

## Magic and Christianity

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, to the post-testament period and beyond, magic, particularly the kind attempting to control God, is condemned. Various syncretistic religions and deviant Christian practices notwithstanding, magic has been condemned in Christianity throughout history. In the following sub-sections, I will provide an overview of some of the relevant texts in the Old and New Testaments and the early post-biblical period.

### *Old Testament*

All manner of witchcraft is condemned in the Law of the Covenant. Most famously in this regard, the Israelites are instructed, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."[13] More specifically, the Israelites are told, "No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead."[14] These laws are not arbitrary bans on foreign religious practices. Israel is being called to become a distinct nation that worships God rightly, part of which is not making "[w]rongful use of the name of the Lord."[15]

There are multiple wrong uses of the Lord's name, and many scholars have put forth arguments for various interpretations of Ex. 20:7 to the exclusion of others. I simply want to

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[13] Ex. 22:18 KJV
[14] Deut. 18:10-11
[15] Ex. 20:7

draw attention to the interpretation of the third commandment as a prohibition on the use of

the divine name(s) in magic. As Yiu-Sing Lucas Chan points out, it does not matter if "one takes

a narrower or broader interpretation, the overall rationale behind the prohibition remains the

same . . . it points to the holiness of God's names . . . the immediate function of the

commandment is to protect and respect the divine name."[16] (2012, 56). Part of protecting and

respecting the divine name is not using it in magic, because as Chan continues:

> A name is closely tied to certain inherent power and identity. Simply put, God's identity
> is God's holiness. A broad and inclusive view of the commandment implies that calling
> upon God's divine name for whatever purposes and in whatever circumstances would
> involve God's holiness and the use of God's power, which should only occur according to
> God's divine will. Therefore, the commandment has a deeper meaning: it aims to
> respect God's holiness and warns the Israelite community against any attempt to coerce
> or manipulate God for its own purpose of fulfillment.

In sum, God is holy, and we are not to make attempts at controlling Him for our own purposes,

such as those made by Balaam who practiced divination.[17]

Two other ways that magic as the manipulation of God is proscribed in the Old

Testament are found in the sacrificial system. First, the way that sacrifices were to be done

stands in contrast to the way sacrifices were done in the other nations. In Lev. 1:8–9, Aaron and

his sons are instructed to put "the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the

altar; but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the

whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering." Following that in the specific instructions for

different kinds of sacrifices, the priests are repeatedly instructed to burn the liver.[18] One of the

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[16] Yiu-Sing Lucas Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life*
(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 56.
[17] Num. 22-24.
[18] Lev. 3:10.

reasons for the burning of the entrails is so that they, especially the liver, could not be used in extispicy and haruspicy, respectively.[19] Such attempts at divination were used by several nations, especially the Babylonians, a fact noted by Ezekiel.[20] Thus, the Israelites were to burn the organs and not use the sacrificial animals for divination like the pagan nations surrounding them. Second, sacrifices were not a means of currying favor with God or bringing Him under any kind of human influence. In the surrounding nations, sacrifices were used to guarantee certain things from one or more gods: rain, fertility, victory in war, etc. For Israel, though, the sacrifices guarantee nothing of the sort. As the Lord told Israel more than once, He cares nothing for their sacrifices if they do not keep the heart of the law.[21] Moreover, sacrifices were not for material gain, but for the forgiveness of sins, purification, sanctification, and restoration of relationships between God and Israel and between people within the nation of Israel.

This has not been an exhaustive survey of every instance that magic is touched on either directly or indirectly in the Old Testament. However, it should suffice to show that magic does not belong in the worship of the Lord. Additionally, God is unmanipulable by human beings, whether it be by means of His name, sacrifice, or any other practice. Instead, He desires obedience, love, and the acceptable sacrifice of "a broken and contrite heart."[22]

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[19] John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 89.
Extispicy is the inspection of the entrails and viscera of sacrificed animals in divination. Haruspicy, also known as hepatoscopy, is a kind of extispicy focusing on the liver which was seen as particularly valuable for discerning divine will.
[20] Ez. 21:21
[21] Jer. 7:21-26; Amos 5:21-24
[22] Ps. 51:17

*New Testament*

While the Old Testament is starkly anti-magic, some might consider the New Testament to be pro-magic. From the calming of a storm and walking on water to people being raised from the dead to the healing effects of robes and shadows, the New Testament seems to be endorsing everything from elemental magic, necromancy, the use of magical talismans, and more. However, this is to confuse magic with miracle. To turn to Kee again, there is nothing magical about the healing stories of the New Testament, "The framework of meaning in which these stories of Jesus' healings are told is not one which assumes that the proper formula or the correct technique will produce the desired results."[23] Instead, the stories are placed in an eschatological frame that views healings and exorcisms "as clues and foretastes of a new situation in which the purpose of God will finally be accomplished."[24] The miracles are enacted freely by God for God's own purposes, but not in response to an incantation.

One example of a miraculous healing serving as a sign in the New Testament is the story of the man born blind. After being asked who is to blame for the man's blindness, the man or his parents, Jesus responds, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."[25] Jesus then spreads some salivary mud on the man's eyes and they are opened. This is not some magical ritual by which Christ manipulates God or some other supernatural force. As the man who was blind says to the Pharisees, "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his

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[23] Kee, 79.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Jn. 9:3

will."[26] It is because of Christ's obedience to God's will and not His manipulation of God's will that a miracle is worked as a spiritual sign for revealing the Son of Man, as is revealed in vv. 35–41b. Thus, miraculous healings, as shown by John, are enacted by God for God's purposes of revealing Himself. They are not enacted by human beings via the manipulation of God's power for human gain.

Likewise, the exorcisms in the New Testament were not magical. Thanks in part to popular superstitions around the demonic throughout the ages and contemporary portrayals of exorcisms in film; exorcisms are all too often thought of as having a magical quality. After all, the exorcist says the magic words and a supernatural being comes under his or her power. However, the success of an exorcism as it is portrayed in the New Testament is dependent on the exorcist's faith in God, not the recitation of the right incantation. The lack of faith leading to a failed exorcism appears twice in the Lukan corpus.

First, in Luke 9, Christ commissions the 12 to proclaim the Kingdom and "gave them power and authority over all demons."[27] Despite being given such great authority, the disciples are not wholly successful, and Jesus is approached by a man whose son has a demon. The man claims to Christ that "I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."[28] In response, Jesus refers to His disciples as a "faithless and perverse generation" before rebuking the demon and healing the boy, thus displaying the greatness of God.[29]

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[26] Jn. 9:30-33
[27] Lk. 9:1
[28] Lk. 9:40
[29] Lk. 9:41-43

Second, in Acts 19, the Apostle Paul is ministering in Ephesus. Upon seeing "the extraordinary miracles" God was doing through Paul, the seven sons of Sceva "tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.'"[30] The exorcism, of course, failed and the demoniac responded, "'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded."[31] The sons of Sceva were unable to exorcise the demon because they tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in a magical way. After witnessing this scene, "A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly."[32]

One final area of possible confusion between magic and miracle in the New Testament that is especially appropriate to clear up is the anointing of the sick in James 5:14, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord." In that verse, it seems that the brother of Jesus is describing a magical ritual that will guarantee healing. Of course, such interpretations miss the broader context of James. In the immediate context of that verse, the healing that happens is connected to penance, faith, and righteousness.[33] Thus, the kind of healing that James describes is a sign of forgiveness, a sign of divine grace. Moreover, James explicitly condemns, albeit in the context of planning for the future, presuming on the Lord allowing us to continue living, "You ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.'"[34] Finally,

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[30] Acts 19:11-13
[31] Acts 19:15-16
[32] Acts 19:19
[33] Jm. 5:15-16
[34] Jm. 4:15

James also condemns prayer for selfish ends and goes so far as to say that his readers do not receive what they want, "because you ask wrongly."[35] Again, James does not have a special prescribed prayer for his readers to pray in order to receive. For James, proper prayer is repentance, praise, and petition in humility energized by faith. As Dan G. McCartney puts it, "Faith energizes prayer, but not because faith is some kind of magical power or psychic force that effectualizes the prayer. Faith is that which connects a person to God and characterizes a relationship with God. It is this relationship to the healing God that secures answers to prayer."[36] It is a relationship that does not demand or presume, yet it is what produces miracles. Thus, there is a profound mystery at the heart of miracles.

Despite the superficial similarities between magic and miracle, the two are radically opposed. As has already been noted above by Kee, the difference is in the inherent attitude and aims of magic and thaumaturgy. On the one hand, there are the magicians who seek to control and manipulate the supernatural, which, as was seen in the case of the sons of Sceva, sometimes means trying to control God. On the other hand, there are the wonder-workers, like St. Nicholas of Myra, whose prayers are that supreme prayer that Christ taught us, "not my will, but thine, be done."[37]

### Post-Biblical Period

One of the best examples of the early church's opposition to magic is found in the apocryphal Acts of Peter, in which Simon Peter confronts Simon Magus.[38] The conflict between

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[35] Jm. 4:3

[36] Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 255.

[37] Lk. 22:42 KJV, cf. Matt. 6:10

[38] Bart D. Ehrman, "The Acts of Peter," in *After the New Testament*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, 263-275 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the Simons first appears in Christian writings in the canonical Acts of the Apostles. The Physician tells us that a certain man named Simon was a magician who "for a long time . . . had amazed [the Samaritans] with his magic."[39] After the conversion of the Samaritans, including Simon Magus, Peter and John came to Samaria in order to lay hands on the Samaritans so that they may receive the Holy Spirit. Then, "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."[40] Peter then rebukes Simon for thinking that he "could obtain God's gift with money," and calls for him to repent, which he does.[41]

However, according to the author of the Acts of Peter, Simon Magus did not remain penitent. Instead, he went to Rome where he started performing magic again. When Peter arrives in Rome, the two men have a series of confrontations. Peter performs a miracle and then Simon tries to imitate it through trickery and magic. Over the course of those confrontations, Peter is shown to be wholly dependent on God, in contrast to the arrogant magician. The contrast is starkest in the deaths of the two men following their battle. Simon Magus' pride literally comes before his fall, when Peter asks God to knock Simon out of the sky, which in turn precipitates his being driven from the city and killed at the hands of two physicians. Simon Peter, however, submits to the will of God to be crucified, and he is so humble that he asks to be crucified upside down because he is not fit to die in the same manner as Christ.

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[39] Acts 8:11
[40] Acts 8:18-19
[41] Acts 8:20-24

In addition to the Acts of Peter, there is a plethora of texts from the Fathers that condemn magic. In making his defense of Christians, Tertullian claims that all manner of magical practices are not practiced by Christians because such practices were revealed by demons and forbidden by God.[42] Likewise, Augustine has nothing but harsh words for magic, and he even goes so far as to condemn so-called "good" or "white" magic (theurgy). Some of his contemporaries claimed that theurgy was an acceptable practice because it was an aid to salvation. To which Augustine replied that souls are not "purged and reconciled to God through sacrilegious likenesses and impious curiosity and magical consecrations."[43] Practitioners of all forms of magic—whether it be black or white—"are entangled in the deceitful rites of demons who may masquerade under the names of angels."[44] In the context of examining new converts who are potential to be permitted to hear the word and be baptized, Hippolytus wrote, "A magician must not be [even] brought for examination. An enchanter, an astrologer, a diviner, a soothsayer, a user of magic verses, a juggler, a mountebank, and amulet-maker must desist or be rejected."[45] Tertullian, Augustine, and Hippolytus are just three examples of a steady stream of criticism against magic by the Fathers.

Space does not permit me to recount every instance that magic was condemned from the end of antiquity to the present. From Mount Horeb to Mount Hazor and from the Capitoline Hill to Gallows Hill, magic has been condemned time and again. Even today, magic continues to

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[42] Tertullian, "Apology," translated by S. Thelwall in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), rev. and ed. for *New Advent* by K. Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm, accessed January 6, 2019.

[43] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), IV.11.

[44] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed., trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1991), X.9.

[45] Hippolytus, "The Apostolic Tradition," in *After the New Testament*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), XVI.21-22.

be condemned in mainstream Christianity, with documents as far apart as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which prohibits magic even for the restoration of health, and a certain evangelical college's community rules prohibiting magic.[46] Yet, there are still some who think and conduct their affairs with a magical mindset, and they even approach prayer and worship of God with this very same mindset. Such a way of thinking and living is not limited to the superstitious and the "backwards." Even the most brilliant of empirical researchers can still fall into the trap of thinking magically, as I will begin to show in the following section in which I will give an overview of the history of empirical studies of prayer.

<u>The Empirical Study of Intercessory Prayer</u>

The empirical study of prayer is nothing new. In 1872, Francis Galton—cousin of Charles Darwin, coiner of the word "eugenics," and inventor of the dog whistle—conducted the first study on the efficacy of prayer. The aim of the study was to find out if prayer could prolong the life of people who pray and people who are prayed for. He collected data on the longevity of several different groups of people: members of the royal houses, clergy, lawyers, English aristocracy, and artists among others.[47] He found that:

> The sovereigns are literally the shortest lived of all who have the advantage of affluence. The prayer has therefore no efficacy, unless the very questionable hypothesis be raised, that the conditions of royal life may naturally be yet more fatal, and that their influence is partly, though incompletely, neutralized by the effects of public prayers.[48]

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[46] Vatican, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM, accessed November 6, 2018.
Wheaton College, "Community Covenant," https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/community-covenant, accessed November 6, 2018.
[47] Francis Galton, "Statistical Inquiries into the Efficacy of Prayer," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 41, no. 4 (2012): 928.
[48] Ibid. 924.

Likewise, the clergy had the shortest life expectancy of the professional classes studied, despite being the most prayerful group.[49]

There are problems with Galton's study, especially that it was a retrospective study that lacked control groups for the various demographics. However, despite these flaws, Galton's basic assumption that the effects of prayer can be proven or disproven via empirical research and his conviction that the line of inquiry "that promises the most trustworthy results is to examine large classes of cases, and to be guided by broad averages" has had a lasting impact.[50] Over a hundred years after Galton in 1988, Randolph C. Byrd conducted his study on the effects of intercessory prayer in the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital. Byrd wanted to study "the therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God," and in order to do so he "approached the study of the efficacy of prayer in the . . . manner suggested by Galton."[51]

Byrd's study was double-blinded with patients randomly assigned to either the intercessory prayer group or the control group, with the intercessory prayer group receiving prayer by Christians from outside the hospital. He did not discriminate based on denomination, but across denominational lines he picked intercessors who "were 'born again' Christians . . . with an active Christian life as manifested by daily devotional prayer and active Christian fellowship with a local church."[52] Each patient was assigned to three to seven intercessors who would pray for the patient every day until discharge. The intercessors were instructed, "to pray

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[49] Ibid. 925.
[50] Ibid. 923.
[51] Byrd, 826, 828.
[52] Ibid. 826-827.

daily for a rapid recovery and for prevention of complications and death, in addition to other

areas of prayer they believed to be beneficial to the patient."[53] Upon entry into the study, the

two groups were statistically similar, but afterward, analysis showed, "the prayer group had less

congestive heart failure, required less diuretic and antibiotic therapy, had fewer episodes of

pneumonia, had fewer cardiac arrests, and were less frequently intubated and ventilated."[54]

Thus, Byrd concluded, intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God is effective for aiding the

recovery of patients in the coronary care unit.

     Yet, despite Byrd's improvements, his study still had several methodological problems,

especially that he did not create a pure control group. In that way, Byrd's study is not unique

because the empirical study of the effects of prayer faces a number of inherent difficulties. In

their review of studies that had been conducted up to the time of their writing, Paul Duckro and

Philip Magaletta acknowledge that studying any aspect of human behavior is hard, but:

> The difficulties only multiply when the experimenter wishes to consider the nature of
> non-observable mediating effects and other supernatural constructs. The very task of
> defining prayer and making it operational, a starting-point in any experimental study of
> the subject, has been the subject of considerable disagreement. For these reasons, it
> will probably come as no surprise that the research which does exist has suffered from a
> number of methodological flaws which prevent firm conclusions. Nevertheless, the
> published work yields valuable and interesting information.[55]

The authors go on to point out the methodological flaws of the studies done over the course of

the 30 years prior to their publication. All the studies they review run headlong into the trouble

of defining prayer, what counts as a successful prayer, and controlling for other factors such as

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[53] Ibid. 827.
[54] Ibid. 829.
[55] Paul Duckro and Philip Magaletta, "The Effect of Prayer on Physical Health: Experimental Evidence," *Journal of Religion and Health* 33, no. 3 (1994): 213.

the medical intervention being used and the myriad other factors that make research on people difficult. In their conclusion, Duckro and Magaletta express mild optimism at the potential for scientists to refine the methodology of studying the health effects of prayer, which means thoroughly defining the form of prayer to be used and then specifying the frequency and duration. In addition, "it would be valuable to assess the level of religious commitment and practice of the patient and his or her family."[56] Ultimately, though, they admit that "Perhaps . . . the technique and tools of science must yield to the sometimes paradoxical and mysterious nature of prayer."[57] The point is that understanding prayer escapes our modern scientific research methodologies.

After Duckro and Magaletta's article, there have been some researchers who have not been content to "yield to the sometimes paradoxical and mysterious nature of prayer." Instead, they have continued to refine Galton's proposed methodology, as was the case of William S. Harris et al., who attempted to replicate Byrd's findings but with a more rigorous methodology. The authors made four improvements to Byrd's study.[58] One, Harris et al. assigned the same number of intercessors—five—to each patient.[59] Two, the study was blind to the hospital staff and patients, whereas in Byrd's study the patients and staff knew there was a study on prayer, which could lead to patients in the control group receiving intercessory prayer. Three, they did not receive informed consent from participants like Byrd did, so that there would not be any bias towards "prayer-receptive" patients. Four, they asked for the intercessors to pray for 28

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[56] Ibid. 217.
[57] Ibid. 218.
[58] Harris et al. 2275.
[59] Ibid. 2274.

days without updates regardless of patient progress or discharge. They made this change so that prayer and the intercessors' commitment to it would remain at the same level and not possibly be intensified.[60] In the end, they did not find an improvement in patient outcomes.[61]

Likewise, Herbert Benson et al. found that "Intercessory prayer itself had no effect on whether complications occurred after CABG [coronary artery bypass graft]."[62] Their double-blind study was randomized across three patient groups: one group who would receive prayer after being told they may or may not receive it, another that would not receive prayer after being told they may or may not receive it, and the last group that would receive prayer after being told they would definitely receive prayer. The point of not having intercessors pray for one of the may-or-may-not-receive-prayer groups was to control for any psychosomatic effects.[63]

Benson et al. made a few improvements over Byrd's and Harris' respective studies, such as number of research sites and study size.[64] Additionally, the researchers inquired after religious beliefs of the participants and whether or not the participants were expecting prayers from anyone in order to further control for bias. Most importantly, Benson et al. gave stricter instructions to the monks, nuns, and tele-prayers interceding for the study participants than the previous researchers had given their intercessors. The intercessors in the STEP study were told "to add the phrase 'for a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications' to their usual prayers."[65] In contrast, Byrd and Harris et al., told the intercessors

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[60] Ibid. 2275-2276.
[61] Ibid. 2274-2275.
[62] Benson et al. 941.
[63] Ibid. 935.
[64] Ibid. 936.
[65] Ibid. 935.

to pray for "a rapid recovery and for prevention of complications and death, in addition to other areas of prayer they believed to be beneficial to the patient."[66] Whereas Byrd's and Harris' instructions are loose and general and expose their studies to error, Benson's instructions are specific and regimented and reduce the possibility of error by controlling the words that are prayed. Such a prescription of words to pray does not resolve all the issues Byrd and Harris faced in trying to create pure control groups or define a uniform style of prayer, but it is a great step toward eliminating bias and finding the most effective words for intercessory prayer.

Neither Benson et al. nor Harris et al. are successful in overcoming all the methodological difficulties described by Duckro and Magaletta, and they have been extensively criticized elsewhere for those flaws. Most damning is the argument that the empirical study of prayer is impossible because of the nature of prayer.[67] However, it is not my aim to write another criticism of the methodology of the empirical study of the power of prayer. Instead, I will cede the possibility and accuracy of such research to the scientists. I will agree with those studying the effectiveness of intercessory prayer, for the purposes of this article, that the grand claim of modern science—that our experiments get at the truth of the world, or if they do not, they will after further refinement—is true in regard to the study of prayer. Given this assumption, the problem at the heart of the empirical study of intercessory prayer, then, is not

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[66] Byrd, 826.
Harris et al. 2274
[67] Jeffrey P. Bishop, "Prayer, Science, and the Moral Life of Medicine," *Internal Medicine* 163, no. 12 (2003): 1405-1408.

whether it is feasible. Rather, the problem is that the impulse behind such an endeavor is magical.

## Simon Magus Physicus

In order for studies of intercessory prayer to be more accurate, researchers must continually refine their definitions of prayer, the practice of prayer in the study, and their methods of controlling for bias. Byrd had this kind of idea of the progress of scientific inquiry when he stated that he was going to conduct his experiment in the "manner suggested by Galton."[68] Then, Harris explicitly sought to improve on Byrd's study. Finally, Benson, though he never explicitly states it, is clearly following in the footsteps of Galton, Byrd, and Harris in order to build on their work. In the progression from Galton to Benson, there is not only a refinement of methodology—from retrospective analysis of death certificates to blinded, randomized, multi-center studies—but also a refinement of instructions for prayer. Galton took what was meant by prayer for granted, Byrd and Harris gave some loose instructions, and Benson gave the specific words to be used. Further studies will also need to control for spoken or unspoken prayer, the posture used, and more.

Eventually, researchers will also need to do comparative studies on different prayers, like they do with different medications, to test questions like the following: is prayer that names the Trinity and not just the word "God" more effective? Does adding prayers to the saints help, and if so which saints? Should intercessors be standing, sitting, kneeling,

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[68] Byrd, 828-829.

prostrating, or genuflecting? Should intercessory prayer be offered privately or "[w]here two or three gather in [Jesus'] name?"[69]

Such refinement of subsequent experimentations is the hallmark of all good scientific research. For example, new medications must go through a gauntlet of trials in order to pin down whether they are effective by removing compounding and confounding factors. However, prayer is not a mere drug or surgical procedure: medical and surgical techniques exist in the physical world, whereas prayer engages the spiritual. Thus, in the development of the kind of experiments presented in the preceding section, there is a deep irony: the more refined scientifically the studies become, the further they go into the realm of the magical.

Here is where examining the researchers' understanding of causation is critical. As mentioned above, science and magic share a common understanding of causal relationships. Thus, it is not surprising that the researchers claim they are engaged in an empirical scientific study. However, donning the mantle of science does not make these studies acceptable. In order for intercessory prayer to be studied scientifically, one would have to conceive intercessory prayer as causally the same as magic, or causally the same as the way a medication works. In other words, empirical studies cannot possibly be studying intercessory prayer, because to do so would require one to conceive it as part of the mechanical structure of reality, that God is a kind of cog in the machine of causes and effects. But again, if we grant that these studies are possible, then the researchers are trying to understand the power of intercessory prayer as a phenomenon with purely physical cause. God no longer plays a role, and any effect is caused by something like the placebo effect, which is in fact one of the things that Benson et

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[69] Matt. 18:20

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al. were looking for in their study. In any event, whether the studies are scientific or magical,

God is reduced to something—a physical phenomenon or a spiritual, cosmic force—that can be

discovered, defined, delimited, duplicated, and deployed. All that being said, the studies are

indeed magical because their very foundation rests on a kind of magical practice.

The magical impulse of the study of intercessory prayer is found right at the start of any

experiment on the subject. As quoted from Duckro and Mageletta above, the "starting-point in

any experimental study of the subject" is the "task of defining prayer and making it

operational." This task as it is described by these authors is in line with the approach to prayer

found in the magical papyri described above. The authors of the magical papyri wrote out

specific prayers that were to be performed in a specific way in order to get a specific result:

they were strictly defining and operationalizing prayer. These prayers were intended to be used

to control God and bring about a desired result.

Researchers who are Christians cannot justify such experiments as properly Christian.

They cannot claim that their research is acceptable, because they are experimenting with

prayer to God, which Byrd specifically wanted to study, and not demons because the invocation

of God's name for magic is prohibited by the command not to take the Lord's name in vain, as

was argued above. Nor can they claim that it is acceptable because they have good intentions

of helping sick patients heal. The sons of Sceva surely had good intentions in performing

exorcisms, as did the practitioners of white magic seeking healing that were condemned by

Augustine.

Finally, the researchers cannot claim that they are studying miracles in an attempt to

claim that their studies are properly Christian. Miracles by their very nature resist being studied

in an empirical manner. For in a miracle, God acts freely in order to give freely, and the very nature of this giving—this grace—escapes our ability to fully understand it. Moreover, it cannot be instrumentalized. If the researchers want to claim that they are studying miracles, which cannot be actually studied, then they are in a sense worse than magicians who want to control God or rationalist scientists who reduce God to a feel-good sensation because they are hucksters who are wasting money, time, and other resources.

Where does this leave Christian researchers? In an attempt to defend experiments on the effectiveness of intercessory prayer, Larry Dossey and David J. Hufford claim that such experiments are not blasphemous and do not qualify as putting the Lord to the test.[70] They are correct because the experiments are worse than just blasphemy and testing: the experiments are magical and being conducted by those who, whether they realize it or not, have adopted a magical mindset. Dossey and Hufford also state that objections to such research should be respected, "yet it seems unreasonable for them to impose these prohibitions on other researchers who do not share their views. In a pluralistic society, it would be impossible to do good science if one were unduly constrained by all of the theological objections present within the society."[71] They are again correct in asserting that research into intercessory prayer cannot be prohibited in our society. However, simply because such research is permitted in our society does not mean that it should be conducted by Christian researchers, nor that it should be supported by Christian institutions such as universities and hospitals. Researchers like the

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[70] Larry Dossey and David J. Hufford, "Are Prayer Experiments Legitimate? Twenty Criticisms," *Explore* 1, no. 2 (2005): 109-117.
[71] Ibid. 110.

agnostic Galton are free to continue their experiments, but the magic incantations that they are

attempting to uncover are not part of proper Christian practice.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that empirical studies on the efficacy of intercessory prayer

should not be conducted by Christian researchers and supported by Christian institutions. The

reason for this claim is that such studies are magical in their structure and driven by a magical

impulse. Magic is an attempt to submit a supernatural force, which in this context is God

Himself, to the will of a human agent via a specific ritual in order to obtain a desired result. For

studies on prayer to be considered good scientific studies, the researchers must define and

operationalize prayer in a manner that is magical. Therefore, for Christians whose Scripture and

tradition condemn magic, such studies are to be avoided.

INTERLUDE: CHAOS CONTROL

Magic and science are, as has just been argued, means of control. The desire for control – of others, of nature, and of God – is as ancient as humanity itself. In fact, we see the pursuit of control early in the account of Eve and the serpent. Eve reaches out and takes the fruit, and its promise of becoming like God, for herself. The initiative is hers, not God's. We see it again and again with the Tower of Babel, Moses murdering the Egyptian and striking the rock, and King Saul's inappropriate sacrifices to name a few more examples in addition to the ones given in relation to magic mentioned in the chapter above. To these biblical examples, we can name any number of ways big and small, corporate and personal that we seek out control.

We desire control, and we desire it I suppose because we are afraid. We are in some sense still a bunch of Neanderthals brandishing burning sticks at saber toothed tigers. We must protect the fire, fuel the fire, and grow the fire until the fire of our fusion reactors lifts us from a dying planet or powers the subspace computers in which our consciousness dwells. We need this fire, now as ever, to drive the monsters back into the dark.

In our popular imagination, the universe is chaotic. It is the monster that must be overcome. When we consider natural history, we see a story of random non-providential becoming. The universe began out of a mass of undifferentiated matter and pure potential that just so happened to give us the bubbling cauldron of the primordial sea that gave rise to life on Earth. The violent history of biological life begins and goes down through the eons eventually culminating in us. It is a history of perpetual becoming that is streaking towards an inevitable

collapse and the death of all life. The techno-scientific project cannot abide such a failure and must marshal its strength to stop death both personal and universal.

Such is the story of Victor Frankenstein. Mary Shelley's novel provides the frame for understanding the relationship between the desire of control and the belief that the universe is fundamentally chaotic. Shelley's tale is on my read a retelling of the ancient mytheme of the Chaoskampf. Through Shelley's work we can more clearly see the connection between the Chaoskampf and modern science. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley exposes the enchantment of modern science particularly as it pertains to the pursuit of everlasting life. As we will see, Frankenstein and the modern scientists he represents are not only modern Prometheuses but also modern Baʿal's.

For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other, I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, "Seek me in chaos." – Isaiah 45:18-19b

## The Promethean Dilemma

The most common interpretation of *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* is the one suggested by Mary Shelley herself in the work's subtitle: Victor Frankenstein as a new Prometheus. He steals something, in his case the power over life and death, from the gods that should only belong to them. Also like Prometheus, he creates a new race of beings. Finally, his hubris is his downfall, again just like Prometheus.

As venerable as this interpretation's pedigree is, Shelley borrowed the epithet "Modern Prometheus" from Immanuel Kant who used it to refer to Benjamin Franklin, it is unsatisfactory for thinking about how humans should and should not use technology to shape our world and ourselves.[2] Particularly, it is unhelpful in addressing transhumanism and its promise of human perfection through technological advancement. The problem is that the Promethean myth presents us with a dilemma from which there is seemingly no escape. On the one hand, we can arrogantly storm heaven and claim a power and perfection that only belongs to the Divine and is not fitting for humans. On the other, we can pursue a separate human perfection.

The latter option seems to be more acceptable, especially to Christians who value humility before God. However, as theologian Anthony Baker points out, pursuing a separate

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[1] Benjamin N. Parks, "From the Waters of Babylon: *Frankenstein,* Transhumanism, and Cosmogony," *Trinity Journal* 40 (December 2019).

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins, trans. Lewis White Beck, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 373.

perfection apart from God is arrogant in its own way because it says that God is not needed for

human perfection or that we should desire something other than to be with our Maker.[3]

Instead, Baker proposes a "diagonal advance:" an advanced towards God-likeness that is

simultaneously a perfecting of the human in cooperation with God and participation in His

being.[4]

There are some who claim that the diagonal advance is a technological project. These

people are the Christian transhumanists, and their basic claim is that the transhumanist project

of "enhancing" human bodies and minds in order to bring about the posthuman, that which is

related to but beyond the human, is in line with Scripture and what we may conventionally call

orthodox Christianity.[5] Their claim can roughly be summarized as follows. Transhumanism is not

wrong per se, only certain ways that the project may proceed are wrong, namely as a new

eugenics. If, the claim continues, we treat people with love and respect, then we can bring

about the transhuman in accord with Christian morality. Leaving aside the possibility of a non-

eugenic transhumanism, transhumanism is still at odds with Christianity on a number of

fundamental beliefs. Of concern in this paper is the way that the cosmogony and ontology of

transhumanism is at odds with the cosmogony and ontology of Christianity.

In order to get at how the ontologies and cosmogonies of Christianity and

transhumanism are at odds, I propose reading *Frankenstein* as the modern retelling of the

*Chaoskampf*. Interpreting Shelley's novel in this way turns Frankenstein from a hubristic man

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[3] Anthony D. Baker, *Diagonal Advance*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2011): 13-33.
[4] Ibid. 285-300.
[5] https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIjpe258HY2gIVDtbACh3mEgnrEAAYASAAEgI8evD_BwE

into a god who contends with the primordial chaos in nature in order to create. A description

more befitting the modern scientists, especially those who support the transhumanist project.

Such an interpretation of Frankenstein's endeavors, will then allow us to pivot towards Genesis,

which in many ways is a response to the myths of the ANE, and the Christian understanding of

creation as a way of reimagining our use of technology.

To that end I will proceed in four steps. First, I will offer my rereading of *Frankenstein*. In

that section, I will explain what the *Chaoskampf* motif is and give two examples from the ANE

before showing how Frankenstein is contending with chaos. Then, I will show how the ontology

held in common by the Gentiles of the Old Testament and Frankenstein is also held by the

transhumanists who are the biggest proponents of human perfection through technological

advancement today. Third, I will show how Genesis in responding to the myths of the ANE sets

up a different ontology – an ontology of peace and love in contrast to the pagan ontology of

conflict and power. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting that the ontology of Genesis can help

us to rethink our use of technology.

<div align="center">Frankenstein: Or the Modern Chaoskampf</div>

<div align="center">*Chaoskampf*</div>

The motif of *Chaoskampf* (struggle with chaos) was introduced in the modern era by

Hermann Gunkel in his seminal work *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and The Eschaton*

(*Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*).[6] In the Chaoskampf, a cultural hero god – usually a

weather deity – contends with a monstrous god of chaos – usually a sea serpent. This motif is

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[6] Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and The Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006): xxvii.
It should be noted that the actual term *Chaoskampf* does not appear in Gunkel's work.

held in common by almost every ancient mythology, and, the claim goes, it has its roots in a Proto-Indo-European myth as evidenced by cultures as far flung as the Norse with Thor and Jörmungandr and the Japanese with Susanoo and Yamata no Orochi holding the motif in common. As entertaining as the Chaoskampf may be, it does not stand on its own as an independent story in many of these myths.

It has important cosmological and creative meaning. As JoAnn Scurlock describes the relationship between Chaoskampf and creation:

> Monster bashing is a feature common to all the mythologies of the ancient world and, not only that, but there is *Kampf* between the good guys and the bad guys in which the good guys (eventually) win. Chaos is, moreover, often involved in these battles, so we may speak with a straight face of *Chaoskampf*. Finally, it is hard not to notice that something very important—whether humankind (by Prometheus), Baʿal's palace in the *Baʿal Epic*, or Babylon in the *Enūma eliš*—is created after the battle that would probably never have been created if the *Chaoskampf* had not taken place. Thus, there was a relationship among creation, Chaos, and *Kampf* in quite a wide range of cultures.[7]

In sum, for many ancient cultures chaos is eternal, that is uncreated without a beginning, and it is hostile. The gods that contend with chaos are also responsible for creative acts, as is the case of Marduk whose tale will be discussed below. Thus chaos is fundamental and necessary for creation as is the violent imposition of power onto chaos. I will turn to two examples of the Chaoskampf: the *Enūma eliš* and the Baʿal Cycle.

### *Marduk and Baʿal*

The *Enūma eliš* dates from the 2nd millennium BC and is one of the oldest written works to survive to the present[8]. It tells the story of how Marduk, the sun and weather god, created the world – particularly Babylon – and ascended to the head of the Akkadian pantheon by slaying Tiamat. The story goes that, "When on high [=Enūma eliš] the heaven had not been

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[7] JoAnn Scurlock, "Introduction," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), ix.
[8] The oldest documents being receipts, recipes for beer, and receipts for beer.

named. Firm ground below had not been called by name," there was only Apsu, the god of fresh water, who intermingled with Tiamat, the goddess of salt water.[9] Out of the waters came the first generation of gods who were very noisy. Unable to get any rest Apsu exclaimed, "Their ways are verily loathsome unto me. By day I find no relief, nor repose by night. I will destroy, I will wreck their ways, that quiet may be restored. Let us have rest!" Upon hearing Apsu's plans, Ea – the god of magic – flipped the table on Apsu and slew him. Ea and his consort, Damkina, then conceive and give birth to Marduk who "was the loftiest of the gods, surpassing was his stature; his members were enormous, he was exceeding tall ... he was strong to the utmost."

Following the birth of Marduk, Tiamat is provoked to seek revenge, and in order to do so she creates the monsters of Akkadian mythology to aid her in battle. Fearing for their lives the gods elect Marduk as their king and ask him to save them from her wrath. He agrees and engages Tiamat in single combat ultimately slaying her with the "Evil Wind." After killing her, Marduk creates the heavens and earth as the poet conveys, "Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her ... into two parts: half of her he set up and ceiled the sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape." He then goes on to create the rest of the world and establish order.

The Baʿal Cycle was written about the same time as the Enūma eliš and tells of how Baʾal (lord) Hadad, the Ugaritic equivalent of Zeus, came to rule the Canaanite pantheon.[10] The

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[9] The following quotes and the Enūma eliš in their entirety can be found in E.A. Speiser, "The Creation Epic," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950): 60-72.

[10] H.L. Ginsberg, "Poems about Baal and Anath," in in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950): 129-142.

narrative starts with El, the father of the gods, asking Kothar wa-Kha to build Yamm, the sea, a

palace in order to appease Yamm. Before Yamm can be appeased he demands to be made lord

of the gods and that Baʿal be handed over to be his slave. Fearing Yamm and his monsters, the

gods acquiesce. Upon hearing this Ba'al rushes into battle with Yamm. Taking in both hands two

magical clubs made for him by Kothar, Baʿal "strikes the pate of Prince [Yamm], between the

eyes … Yamm collapses, he falls to the ground; his joints bend, his frame breaks. Baal would

rend, would smash Yamm, would annihilate Judge Nahar." However, Yamm is spared through

the intercession of Ashtoreth and is confined to the sea. Following Yamm's defeat, "a silver and

gold house, a house of most pure lapis lazuli" is built for Ba'al that covers "A thousand fields."

However, Baʿal's victory is not absolute. Yamm is not totally defeated and returns to

threaten Baʿal and the latter's established order. For order to be protected and not collapse

back into undifferentiated chaos, Yamm must be defeated again and again. Thus, creation is

never secure, and there is an eternal struggle between chaos and order. Here it will be helpful

to note another shade of meaning for "chaos." In addition to chaos as primal undifferentiated

and potentially hostile substance, what can be called cosmogenic chaos, there is also chaos as a

threat to order, what is called kratogenic chaos. While there is debate over to what extent each

understanding of chaos is present in the ANE myths, they are both indeed present.[11]

Thus, there is "a relationship among creation, Chaos, and Kampf," such that chaos is

simultaneously the very basic stuff of creation to be put to use by the hero and a threat to the

order created by the hero. Put in more modern scientific terms, chaos is simultaneously the

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[11] Karen Sonik, "From Hesiod's *Abyss* to Ovid's rudis indigestaque moles: Chaos and Cosmos in the Babylonian 'Epic of Creation,'" in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 1-25,

original singularity and entropy or the Big Bang and the Big Crunch. Given this description of the creation of the world coming from Chaoskampf, it is not a stretch to say that the ancient mythologists held to an ontology of chaos. More specifically, their ontology is a kind of monism that holds that all beings are at their core made from the same initially undifferentiated and unintelligible, that is chaotic, substance, and these beings are threatened by a collapse back to the primordial source. Differentiated, that is ordered, beings come into existence and remain in existence through the imposition of structure onto the primordial substance. Although some differentiation may occur without the imposition of structure – say between Apsu and Tiamat, fresh and saltwater – it is only through the power of Marduk that order is established and differentiated beings continue to exist and not collapse back into the source. To sum up, existence is chaotic and becoming is violent.

### Baʿal Frankenstein

The *Kampf* in *Frankenstein* is not, as the popular interpretation goes, between Frankenstein and his creation, but between Frankenstein and nature. The young doctor does not pursue his studies of natural philosophy apathetically. His discovery of power over life and death and the creation of his monster are not the result of naïve curiosity. Instead, they are the culmination of Frankenstein contending with nature.

According to what he tells Captain Walton, Frankenstein's childhood was Edenic. Beloved by his parents and raised in a comfortable upper class household with his dear cousin and younger siblings, Frankenstein knew no suffering or pain. All of that changed when his mother died of scarlet fever prior to his departure for the University of Ingolstadt. Chaos had intruded into his life.

When he arrives at the university, Frankenstein meets M. Waldman who tells him that modern scientists, "have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of the heaven."[12] Frankenstein departs "highly pleased with the professor and his lecture" to do battle with chaos just like the others in his hero-god lineage.[13] He "pursue[s] nature to her hiding places," but he does not strike out with the wind of Marduk or the clubs of Ba'al. Instead, he deploys the apparatus of modern science and technology to "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works."[14]

This endeavor is hard on Frankenstein. He is not a white-collared career researcher with funding from the NIH or DARPA working nine-to-five in a tidy lab. As Frankenstein tells the ship captain, "After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life," but his struggle was not over.[15] Buoyed by his will to create, Frankenstein carries on despite the fact that his "cheek had grown pale with study, and [his] person had become emaciated with confinement" and he at times failed.[16] The horrific nature of his struggle causes Frankenstein to tremble and his "eyes to swim with the remembrance of how he was cut off from the rest of humanity in his laboratory" and how "The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased."[17] Eventually this takes a toll on his health and he is afflicted by a fever and nervous anxiety. Nevertheless, he succeeds in subjugating nature and creating something from it.

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[12] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, (Seattle: Amazon, 2017): 40
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid. 40, 48
[15] Ibid. 45
[16] Ibid. 47
[17] Ibid. 47-48

However, just as the struggles of Marduk and Ba'al did not result in the complete defeat of chaos, so too Frankenstein's victory is not absolute. In an ironic twist, the result of Frankenstein's labors becomes an embodiment of chaos. As a harbinger of death, the creature threatens Frankenstein with the one thing he fears most and serves as a reminder that Frankenstein's mastery of the world is tentative at best. Like Ba'al, who had to contend with Yamm again, Frankenstein must fight his progeny in order to stave off death, the collapse back to disorder.

Thus, Frankenstein engages in a Chaoskampf of his own. The monster would not have been created if Frankenstein did not engage in a struggle with the forces of nature. This struggle, like those found in mythology, culminated in the hero god of that age – the weather god for an agrarian society and the modern scientist for our industrial society – subjugating the chaotic force, which for Frankenstein was the power of life and death itself. Only then, once the power in nature has been tamped down is something, in this case the monster, able to be created. Furthermore, the struggle must perpetually continue in order for order to be maintained.

Just as Frankenstein repeats the struggle of his literary ancestors, so too do certain scientists, philosophers, artists, and even Christian theologians seek to engage, or more accurately are currently engaging, nature in a Chaoskampf of their own. These descendants of Frankenstein are known as the transhumanists. Like Frankenstein, they are seeking power over life and death and are contending with nature to gain this power. The goal in gaining such power is to then use it to subjugate human nature so that it can be used to create something "better" – the posthuman, that which is related to but beyond the human. Also like

Frankenstein, they hold to the ontology of the ancient creation myths, a point to which I will now turn my attention.

## All Things Flow from the Tigris and Euphrates

Space does not permit a full Foucauldian genealogy of how the ontology found in the Chaoskampf has come to be held by the transhumanist. Therefore, a severely truncated version will have to suffice. First, I will briefly discuss the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. Then, I will present what is known as Nietzsche's power ontology, and how Heidegger identified it as the essence of technology. Next, I will show how the ontology of the Chaoskampf is present in transhumanism in the form of Nietzsche's power ontology. Finally, I will conclude this section by explaining how, given its appropriation of the ontology of the ANE and Nietzsche, transhumanism has the potential to be exceptionally dangerous.

Heraclitus is most famous for his saying *panta rhei* (all things flow).[18] Although there is much debate on what Heraclitus meant by *panta rhei* and whether or not he actually said it, one of the common interpretations throughout history starting with Plato has been that Heraclitus thought that change was the only constant: the only thing that does not change is the fact that things change. Everything is in a constant state of flux, nothing is permanent. Reality is fundamentally chaotic.

At first blush it seems odd to claim that a Greek philosopher shared the ontology of ancient Semitic mythologists. First, it is odd because the early Greek philosophers – the pre-Socratics and especially Socrates himself – are often depicted as being the first to reject

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[18] This saying is preserved in Plato's *Cratylus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/cratylus.html, accessed April 29, 2018.

mythology and create a new way of thinking out of whole cloth. Second, Heraclitus is *Greek*.

Therefore, if he had been influenced by mythology, he would have been influenced by Hesiod's

*Theogony* not the Akkadian *Enūma Elis* or Ugaritic *Baʿal Cycle*. To these objections two quick

replies can be made. One, mythology was part of Heraclitus' milieu, so it would be highly

unlikely that he was not influence to some degree by mythology. Second, as noted above, the

Chaoskampf was present in the Indo-European as well as Near Eastern mythologies, and

Heraclitus' home town of Ephesus was in Anatolia, a cross road for both cultures. Additionally,

the Chaoskampf in the form of Zeus' battle with Typhon is present in Greek mythology,

including even the *Theogony*. The two creation myths used above were chosen because they

are older than Hesiod's work, serve as a bridge to Genesis, and are actually more similar to the

Greek philosophers' understanding of chaos than Hesiod's.[19] How Heraclitus came to his

ontology, whether by way of Greece or the ANE, is of secondary importance. What matters

primarily is that in Heraclitus we see the transition of the chaos ontology from mythology to

philosophy, and through the history of philosophy it comes down to our present time in the

form of Friedrich Nietzsche's ontology.

According to Nietzsche the fundamental reality of the world is the Dionysian, that is to

say chaotic, force. As philosopher Jeffrey Bishop and others have noted, the Dionysian force is

similar to but different from Darwinian selection because all "entities that 'exist' in the present

are those that have successfully survived by virtue of the creative forces that sustain them in

that momentary state."[20] This is the case, on Nietzsche's ontology, of all beings from rocks to

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[19] Sonik, 13.

[20] Jeffrey P. Bishop, "Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35 (2010), 705.

humans. Humans are no exception and are "simply the way that the creative forces of the natural order shape the being in this way for the moment."[21] Anything else we tell ourselves is just a convenient lie to help us live, another example of power extending itself. Thus, everything for Nietzsche is reducible to a fundamental chaotic force, which led John Richardson to coin the term "power ontology" to describe Nietzsche's ontology.[22]

The power ontology is the ontology of transhumanism, as Bishop argues.[23] The main difference between the Nietzschian and transhumanist understandings of chaotic, creative power is that for Nietzsche the will to power, the will to exist, has no definite *telos* and no intentional thought driving it. It is fundamentally amoral and a-teleological. The scientist creating a weapon in the lab is no different than the lion eating the gazelle. The will just is – a brute fact, which means that in the evolutionary struggle there is no guarantee that a being will continue to exist or reproduce. Furthermore, Darwinian evolution has no grand telos, whatever will happen happens. However, with the advent of homo sapiens – a rational being – we get an ordering of evolution toward a kind of local telos set by those who can design. Anatomically modern humans, or homo sapien sapiens, who possess the cumulative technological knowledge that began with the first humans to use the Promethean fire have just within their grasp to finally take us beyond the merely human.

Thus with the transhumanists, contrary to Nietzsche, "we get designer evolution. The human will to power turns to consciously and with agency control the evolutionary movement

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[21] Jeffrey P. Bishop, "Nietzsche's Power Ontology and Transhumanism: Or Why Christians Cannot Be Transhumanists," in *Christian Perspectives on Transhumanism and the Chruch,* ed. Steve Donaldson and Ron Cole-Turner, forthcoming, 7
[22] John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12-13.
[23] Bishop, "Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God."

toward the purposes of the human will."[24] Through the power of our technology, we can now

command the forces of chaos instead of having them command us, and we can use them to

create whatever we want, including the posthuman. We are like the gods of old: born out of

chaos – the gods were born by Tiamat and Apsu – but bending chaos to our will. Or perhaps

Nietzsche is right and transhumanism is just one more lie we tell ourselves. After all, if the gods

who used chaos to create were themselves born of chaos, then they are just another instance

of chaotic power manipulating chaotic power. Regardless of whether or not we truly have

agency, the end ontology is the same.

Bishop is not the only philosopher to notice the similarities between transhumanism

and Nietzschean philosophy, especially since Nietzsche's Übermensch sounds a lot like the

posthuman. As Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* concerning the Übermensch (here

translated as superman), "I teach you the superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed.

What have ye done to surpass man? All beings hitherto have created something beyond

themselves: and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide and would rather back to the beast

than surpass man?"[25] However, despite what seems to be ready compatibility between the

Übermensch and the posthuman, not everyone is convinced, particularly Nick Bostrom who

points out that Nietzsche did not have technological transformation in mind when he wrote

about the Übermensch.[26]

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[24] Bishop, "Nietzsche's Power Ontology and Transhumanism: Or Why Christians Cannot Be Transhumanists," 7 Cf. Bishop, ""Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God," 706.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2012), 12, Kindle.

[26] Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," (2005): 4-5, accessed January 31, 2018, https://nickbostrom.com/papers/history.pdf.

Although Bostrom is correct that Nietzsche did not write about technological transformation, he is wrong to suppose that lacuna means there are no similarities between Nietzsche and transhumanist philosophies, especially since Max More – who gave Bostrom his definition of transhumanism – has stated that he was directly influenced by Nietzsche.[27] Stefan Sorgner has detailed the similarities between the two on a more fundamental level in part by extensively citing Bostrom side-by-side with Nietzsche.[28] The fount of these similarities is Nietzsche and the transhumanists' shared view of nature and values as Sorgner points out, "'Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress,' Bostrom says. So does Nietzsche. He holds a dynamic will-to-power metaphysics which applies to human and all other beings, and which implies that all things are permanently undergoing some change."[29] Sorgner then uses this shared metaphysic to argue that transhumanism is the logical next step in Nietzsche's understanding of evolution.[30] Thus, Sorgner, More, and Bostrom – though he does not realize it – agree with Bishop's assessment that transhumanism is Nietzschean.

Despite the agreement that Nietzsche's philosophy is at the core of transhumanism, Sorgner and More part company with Bishop in regards to whether or not it is bad. Sorgner and More both seem to think that overcoming humanity is good and that the overcoming can be accomplished in such a way as to avoid the excesses of the eugenic programs of the first half of the 20th century.[31] To the contrary, Bishop argues that the power ontology, which the

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[27] Max More, "The Overhuman in the Transhuman," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 2.
[28] S.L., Sorgner, "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (December 2008), 29-42.
[29] Ibid. 30
[30] Ibid. 39-40.
Cf. Bishop, "Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God," 707
[31] Sorgner, 34-37.

transhumanists explicitly embrace, is extraordinarily dangerous.[32] In order to understand why

Bishop thinks that transhumanism is dangerous we must turn to Heidegger and his critiques of

technology and humanism.

Heidegger claimed that the Nietzschean ontology that reduces everything to a source of

power, or "standing-reserve" as he put it, was the essence of technology. Such an

understanding of the world served as an "enframing" (Gestell).[33] The enframing restricts our

vision to only seeing things as "standing-reserve" waiting to be put to our use by our techno-

logic, what Heidegger calls "challenging forth." Standing-reserve and challenging forth stand in

contrast to seeing a thing in all its thingness and working with it, not coercing it. In order to help

elucidate this point, Heidegger contrasts a hydroelectric dam with a water wheel.[34]

In the former, the river is subjugated to the human will as it is captured and forced

through the dam. In the latter, the miller sticks the wheel out into the river tapping a portion of

the river's power but allowing the rest to flow freely and be itself. With the dam the river is

seen merely as a source of power and the rest drops from view, while with the wheel the

beautiful, ecological, and other aspects of the river can still be seen and appreciated. Another

example would be the difference between an Appalachian mountain as merely a source of coal

waiting to have its top removed versus a home for people and animals that has some coal.

We see the enframing and challenging forth in *Frankenstein*. It begins when

Frankenstein meets M. Waldman who disabuses him of his love of the alchemists, particulary

More, "The Overhuman in the Transhuman," 4.
[32] Bishop, "Nietzsche's Power Ontology and Transhumanism: Or Why Christians Cannot Be Transhumanists," 10
[33] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 299, 301.
[34] Ibid.

Albertus Magnus, also known as St. Albert the Great. While St. Albert's greatest scientific

accomplishment was the discovery of arsenic, he is better known for his commentaries on

Aristotle and best known as Thomas Aquinas' teacher. In rejecting Albertus Magnus,

Frankenstein is rejecting the medieval Christian Aristotelian understanding of nature as created

and ordered towards a *telos.*

From those older natural philosophers, Frankenstein turns to the modern natural

philosophers, those whom we now call scientists. As M. Waldman explains the difference

between the old natural philosophers and the new:

> "The ancient teachers of this science," said [Waldman], promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows." I departed highly pleased with the professor and his lecture.[35]

Scientific engagement with nature according to Waldman is about acquiring "new and

unlimited powers." It is not to appreciate the beauty and mystery of nature as it speaks to us

about itself and about God. As shown above, Frankenstein agrees with Waldman and imposes

his will on to nature. Frankenstein notes that during his endeavors:

> Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours; but I did not watch the blossom of the expanding leaves – sights which before always yielded me supreme delight, so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation. The leaves of that year had withered before my work drew near to a close.[36]

The beauty and delightfulness of nature drop from Frankenstein's view and consideration

because he is caught up in the enframing of standing-reserve or power.

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[35] Shelley 39-40
[36] Shelley, 49.

When the enframing is turned on to the human, we get transhumanism. In *The Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger argues that every humanism, which transhumanism is a type of, fails to capture the fullness of the being of humans. That is to say that humanism requires defining what it means to be human and in so doing inevitably leaves off some aspect of what it means for humans to be. On this point Heidegger gives the example of what he identifies as the first humanism, the Roman understanding of humans as rational animals.[37] If we define humans as animals, then everything we say about humans will be how we are like or unlike other animals. Moreover, by defining humans as "rational" anyone who is not deemed "rational" is not human. Thus, by elevating some aspect(s) of being human to the definition of what it means to be human, humanism includes some and excludes others from the community of humanity.

By identifying humans as fundamentally nothing more than advanced concatenations of power to be put to use, transhumanists are claiming that the only good things about humans are those that are deemed "useful." Thus, humans, like the rest of the natural world, are nothing more than chaotic material to be subdued and shaped into whatever the new gods of our technological age will. In turning the human into the posthuman, the techno-gods must determine what they want to include and exclude from the posthuman. What is included will inevitably be what is valued, what is "useful." Frankenstein was no different in shaping his monster to be male and to be bigger, smarter, and more powerful than any human.

Here the danger of transhumanism becomes clearer. Like the other pagan creation narratives, transhumanism is rooted in violence, so it must act violently to bring about its

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[37] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 203.

desired results. In determining what will be excluded from the posthuman, the techno-gods will not just exclude certain traits. They will exclude certain people. One need not look any further than the Icelandic "cure" for Down Syndrome – the killing of every fetus with an elevated chance of trisomy-21 – to see this tendency at play.[38] As morally horrifying as that sounds, for the transhumanists it is not. It would make no more sense to deem such a program immoral as it does to say that the eagle is evil for swooping down on its prey, to borrow an example from Nietzsche. The inclusion and exclusion of certain people from the human community in the transhumanist program to borrow another locution, "Isn't personal. It's strictly business."[39]

How then do we resolve this problem presented by the chaos ontology as it comes down to us from the ancients and plays itself out in our modern technology? As mentioned in the introduction, the Promethean myth is unhelpful. It forces us to choose one of two options, neither of which is good. We can be like Prometheus and storm the heavens and take hold of a power that we should not have, and in so doing become like his sister-in-law Pandora and release all kinds of suffering on the world. Alternatively, we can go our own way and reject any good that can come from technological and, in this case, human advancement. Likewise, rethinking *Frankenstein* in terms of ancient creation mythology has thus far made matters worse. However, by helping us think of how a certain understanding of technology rests on a particular understanding of creation, the Chaoskampf actually opens up the possibility of reconsidering technology in light of a different creation account.

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[38] Julian Quinones and Arijeta Lajka, "'What Kind of Society do You Want to Live in?': Inside the Country where Down Syndrome is Disappearing," *CBS NEWS,* August 15, 2017, accessed February 27, 2018, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland/

[39] *The Godfather*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1972).

## A More Excellent Way Over the Face of the Waters

The traditional Christian interpretation of the ancient Hebrew account of creation stands in stark contrast to that which is found in the pagan myths both ancient and contemporary. Whereas those myths give us an ontology of chaotic power and violence, the story of creation in Genesis and the theology that develops from it gives us an ontology of love. There is not space to give a complete account of the doctrine of creation here, so a brief sketch will have to suffice.[40] To this end, I will begin with Genesis and its account of peaceful creation *ex nihilo*, which will in turn allow us to speak of creation reflecting its Creator.

The creation account in Genesis is in many ways a subversion or rebuttal of the earlier ANE creation myths. Traces of these myths can be found throughout the first three chapters of Genesis: the presence of primordial waters, the days of creation, and the creation of humanity as an admixture of the earthly and divine to name a few. What sets Genesis apart from myths such as the *Enūma eliš* is the lack of *kampf*. The creation of the heavens and the earth is irenic. The divine wind that moves or hovers "over the face of the waters" is not the Evil Wind that Marduk uses to distend Tiamat's bowels. Instead, it is the Spirit of God contemplating what will be created out of the water.[41]

Moreover, the waters in Genesis are neither a rival deity – the creation narrative goes to great pains to not ascribe divinity to anything other than God – nor uncreated matter coeternal with God. Although whether or not the ancient Hebrew author(s) of Genesis had creation ex

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[40] For a fuller account of the contrast between ontologies and the doctrine of creation see:
Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*
Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[41] JoAnn Scurlock, "Searching for Meaning in Genesis 1:2: Purposeful Creation out of *Chaos* without *Kampf*," in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

nihilo in mind when they wrote of creation is a matter of extensive debate and the author(s) of

Genesis seem uninterested in explaining the origin of the waters, there is little reason to not

suppose that creation ex nihilo is at least latent in Genesis.[42] In any event, creation ex nihilo is

the traditional Christian understanding of the Hebrew creation story regardless of debates in

Biblical literary studies. Therefore, the waters are created and can only serve, not threaten,

their creator as is shown in all instances of thalassic imagery in Scripture from the diluvian

waters rising and receding at God's command to Leviathan – an analog of Yamm and Tiamat –

being His pet to Jesus quieting the Sea of Galilee.[43]

Since God does not create the world out of a struggle with chaos, creation is not

fundamentally chaotic and violent. Moreover, there is nothing – not even a vacuum since that is

space, a created a thing – out of which God creates other than Himself. Therefore, we cannot

speak of creation in terms of anything other than its Creator and how it relates to Him. I will

consider the latter first.

Unlike the world that was created from Tiamet and thus had a separate, distinct being

from Marduk, creation's relation to God is one of continual participation in Him. As Aratus said

rightly according to St. Paul, "'In Him we live and move and have our being.'"[44] We can begin to

understand this by thinking of the difference between God's existence and our own. God was

the only One who existed – whatever that means – before all creation, God's being – again

whatever that means – is the only one that is self-sustained and basic. All else that exists is

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[42] R.R. Reno, *Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010): 29-39
Oliver, 35-42
[43] Gen. 8:1-3, Job 41:1, Mark 4:35-41
[44] Acts 17:28

dependent on God for its own existence. Put differently, if God ceased to exist, then the world

and everything in it would cease to exist, but the opposite is not true. Ergo, we can speak of

creation participating in God because of its dependency on God for its continual existence.[45]

The inexpressible difference between God and creation expressed in creation's wholly

dependent existence paradoxically means that God is intimately related to His creation. All

creatures relate to one another by either holding something in common or by a mediating act,

but creation and God hold nothing in common and there is no mediating act other than

creation ex nihilo.[46] The sheer difference between God and creation then leads to the great

intimacy between God and creation because there is nothing needed to relate God to His

creation. This intimate dependency has the psalmist wondering, "Where can I go from your

spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" and the Bishop of Hippo confessing, "You were

more intimately present to me than my innermost being."[47]

Because creation participates in God in such a way that God is intimately related to

creation, it becomes a source of revelation of who God is. Again, as the psalmist tells us, "The

heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day

uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."[48] Even if one thinks that God can

only be known through the intellect, whether by reason or revelation alone, the intellect is a

created thing. Creation is inescapably necessary for knowledge of God, and what is revealed to

us is that "God is love."[49]

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[45] Oliver, 62.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ps. 139:7-8 KJV
Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012): III.6.11
[48] Ps. 19:1 KJV
[49] 1 Jn. 4:8

That God is love is understood – however dimly – in the incomprehensibly radical self-giving and mutuality of the Holy Trinity. From the excessive love in the community of persons in the Trinity comes creation, which is a Triune act.[50] As Augustine describes it:

> The Father in the word 'God' and the Son in the word 'beginning'; the beginning, not for the Father but for the creation created at the start through himself, and chiefly for the spiritual, and consequently for the totality of creation; while with scripture saying: *And the Spirit of God was being borne over the water,* we recognize the complete indication of the Trinity.[51]

Interpreting Augustine, David Meconi writes, "God's act of creating mirrors the self-giving that eternally occurs within the Trinity: the Father is the one who speaks, the Son is the *principium* in whom all things are made, and the Spirit hovers over the waters as a sign of God's unifying order and dominion."[52] That creation is a Triune act is also found in the New Testament such as the opening of John's Gospel and certain passages in the Pauline Epistles attest.[53] All creation including our very being, then, is a gift that is given to us by God of Himself out of the excessive giving internal to the Trinity.

Just as we could talk about the myths of the ANE setting up an ontology of power based on creation coming from chaos and conquest, so we can now talk here about Genesis setting up an ontology of love based on creation coming from God who is love. The created world is not, as poets of old and the technophiles of today see it: something to be subdued and conquered so that we can continue to exist in this form or a "higher" one through our own might. Instead, it is a gift given to us, so that we can continue to exist by moving into deeper knowledge and love of the source of all existence by the power of that Source. More to the heart of the matter,

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[50] Oliver, 51.

[51] Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram,* 1.6, cited in David Vincent Meconi, SJ, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification*, 6

[52] Meconi, 6

[53] E.g. Jn. 1:1-4, Col. 1:15-17

all of creation – including ourselves – is a gift meant to be given back to the Giver as King David

prayed, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill

offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."[54] We are to use

creation to move higher and closer to God in a rich, pale mimicry of the Trinity.

Even though creation is a good gift, there is a danger in using creation to come to know

God; we must be careful – as Augustine warns us – to not let the created become the end of

our desires in place of the Creator. Because like travelers trying to return home who become

captivated by the act of traveling, "we would be perversely enjoying things that we should be

using; and we would be reluctant to finish our journey quickly, being ensnared in the wrong

kind of pleasure and estranged from the homeland whose pleasures could make us happy."[55]

Delighting in the journey for the journey's sake is what the enframing of the power ontology

brings about. By reducing all of creation to power to be used for whatever ends we want to

deploy it, we lose sight of how God is speaking to us in the river, the mountain, and those

excluded by definitions of the human. Divorced of its reference to God, its *telos*, creation

becomes only that which the enframing allows us to see – power manipulating power – and not

the truth: gifts giving gifts to the Giver of all gifts.

To return to *Frankenstein*, Shelley depicts the birth of a new technological cosmogony.

However, as she describes it in her novel it is as old as the ANE myths. Today, we continue to

live in the ontological enframing of the scientific-technological-industrial world set up by this

cosmogony, as evidenced by the rise of the transhumanists. So long as the created world is

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[54] 1 Chron. 29:14 NRSV
[55] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R.P.H Green, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): I.4

seen as the transhumanists see it, as something to be contended with, we will continue to be the modern Prometheuses: spurning the gift of the created world – especially our bodies – thinking that we will "be like god," and as Waldman tells Frankenstein, "ascend into the heavens" by our own power.

The Christian alternative to the ancient but new cosmogony has to be a world that is created ex nihilo and participates in divine being.  It cannot be one that sees the world as something to be conquered and put to whichever immediate end we desire. Our use of technology must be such that we use nature, including our bodies, to come to know, to love, and to serve the Lord "with gladness and singleness of heart."[56] Moreover, our use of technology cannot be one that decides what does and does not count as human – those beings who are so beloved of God that the Second Person became a man. That is to say, that a properly Christian understanding and use of technology cannot be violent action springing from an ontology of violence, of chaos and power, that is rooted in a violent cosmogony.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that *Frankenstein* is a retelling of the Chaoskampf from ancient mythology. The myth of the Chaoskampf as it has been passed along through history presents an understanding of the world that can best be described as an ontology of chaos and power. This ontology is the basis on which modern technological advancement is undertaken and becomes a danger to us. Yet, we are not without hope because the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo tells a different story, one of creation being a gift of love.

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[56] Acts 2:46 KJV

Finally, the reader may be left wondering: what does the development and use of technology look like specifically given an ontology of love? Alas, I do not know because I have only ever lived in a society in which our technology is under the sway of the enframing Heidegger described, and there are at best only glimmers of how things might otherwise be. However, if we are going to get outside of the enframing and break away from the false dilemma of the Promethean myth and change our approach to and engagement with technology, we must re-narrate our understanding of how the world was made. We must begin "In the beginning."

INTERLUDE: FEARFUL PRIDE

God does not create evil. He only creates good. He does not need anything chaotic to bring about His work because He creates from nothing. That much has just been established. Yet, we are confronted with statements from God like this one given to Isaiah, "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things."[1] Such a revelation would seem to suggest that those evils that may have at one time been attributed to the eternal chaotic element of the universe are in fact attributable to God. To make matters worse, He is a "God who hides Himself" and He pronounces woe upon those who question His inscrutable decrees.[2]

When the full revelation of God is given in the person of Jesus Christ, there is still no answer given for why suffering exists beyond what seems to be the arbitrary display of Divine power. The man born blind is born as such, "so that God's work might be revealed in him."[3] Jesus delays going to Lazarus, so that He can raise the latter man from the dead. He does not offer any reason for His delay other than wanting to show that He was sent from the Father. Now, for those of us born at this time, we do not see Him walking the Earth and raising the dead.[4] If anything death has only increased in scale and cruelty. We are left like Martha to

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[1] Is. 45:7
[2] Is. 45:9, 15
[3] John 9:3
[4] I am ready to admit that we do not see these miracles because we do not have eyes to see.

contend with the Lord, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died," but unlike her, we have to wait for the resurrection of the last day.[5]

Waiting for the resurrection is hard. It has always been hard, and we live in an age that questions the prudence of that waiting more so than any other age. With all the tragedies of the last century and a half or so, it is easy to despair, to cry out "How long, O Lord?"[6] When the answer is nothing but the silence of God, it is easy to believe that God has abandoned us or at the very least needs our help. So, we strike out on our own with our science and technology. If God will not, for whatever reason, tame the world, raise the dead, and reverse entropy, we will do it for Him. We will make sure that the dead come back to life.

Perhaps then, it is fear that drove Eve to take the apple. She doubted the goodness of God and the surety of His promise that she would one day be like Him, so she sought control over her own destiny. To say that she was motivated by fear is not to say that pride was not the root of her sin, but it is a pride that is a far cry from the pride exhibited by Milton's Satan. She set herself over against God, but it was not out of hubris like Satan.

We seek control over chaos because this chaos causes us to despair. Our despair is self-perpetuating because it is a kind of passive nihilism, a type of not caring. We do not question the understanding of the world presented to us by modern techno-science, and thus, we do not question the presence of the Chaoskampf in its cosmogony. Instead, we absorbed this understanding of the world uncritically, and then turn to techno-science for a solution even as

[5] Jn. 11: 21, 24
[6] Ps. 13

it at the same time fuels our despair. This connection between despair, or more precisely

acedia, and the pursuit of control over chaos is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: A THOUSAND AND ONE THEBAIDIAN NOONS[1]

All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. – Ecclesiastes 1:8-9

Introduction

Critiques of transhumanism from Christian theologians and philosophers often focus on the movement's disdain for the human body. These critiques are expressed in a number of different ways. Some argue that the transhumanists' disdain is a new form of Gnosticism, while others argue that it leads to real violence against real human bodies.[2] When such critiques turn to identify the particular sin of which transhumanism is guilty, they sometimes identify vainglory as the besetting sin, but more often than not pride is the sin named. After all, what is transhumanism – with its various proposals for bringing about the posthuman, which is some future being with capabilities so far beyond the human so as to border on godlike – but the latest iteration of the primal sin of humans wanting to become God on their own terms?

While such critiques are true, they do not capture the full reality of transhumanism's sins from a Christian perspective. Pride and vanity are indeed two of the deadly sins of transhumanism, but there are others at play as well. Moreover, pride is the root of all sin, so saying that pride is the problem is not necessarily helpful. We must find the particular ways in which pride manifests itself. I will argue that the sin of acedia (sometimes spelled accidie), found in ancient lists of the deadly sins, is a primary sin of transhumanism. In so doing, I hope

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[1] Benjamin N. Parks, "A Thousand and One Thebaidian Noons: Transhumanism and Acedia," *The Heythrop Journal* (January 21, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13481.

[2] E.g. Jeffrey C. Pugh, 'The Disappearing Human: Gnostic Dreams in a Transhumanist World,' *Religions* 8, no. 81 (May 3, 2017), https://doi.org/ 10.3390/rel8050081. Also, Jeffrey P. Bishop, 'Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God,' *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35 (November 2010): 700-720.

to contribute to a more complete diagnosis of the transhumanist project from a Christian

perspective, and I also hope to further show why transhumanism is at odds with Christianity,

contra the claims of the Christian Transhumanist Association.[3] It should also be stated up front

that this article may raise more questions than it answers. Accordingly, it should be seen as an

invitation for further research, not as a definitive treatment of acedia in transhumanism.

I will proceed in four steps. First, I will put forth a working definition of acedia for the

purposes of this paper because acedia is a notoriously difficult sin to define. Next, following

along with Aldous Huxley and Brent P. Waters, I will identify acedia as the most characteristic

sin of modernity and by extension modern technology. Then, turning to the recent work by

Nolen Gertz, I will complete my diagnosis by examining the relationship between acedia,

nihilism, and transhumanism. Finally, I will turn to the virtue of courage, which John Cassian

proposes as the cure for acedia, and conclude with a meditation on how the courage displayed

by Christ in the Incarnation is an antidote to the acedia of transhumanism.

## Acedia

Of all the vices listed in ancient hamartiological accounts, acedia is the most difficult to

define. Often regarded as the precursor to sloth, it captures the meaning of sloth and a variety

of additional thoughts, habits, and actions. Thus, it is far harder to succinctly define acedia than

it is wrath. Beginning with a basic etymology we find that, acedia is a Latin loanword that comes

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[3] The Christian Transhumanist Association, 'The Christian Transhumanist Affirmation,'
https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/affirmation (this and all following Internet sites accessed October 31, 2019).

from the Greek *akedia*, which means "lack of care," specifically lack of care for one's dead.[4]

Such a lack of care "was an essential characteristic of dehumanization."[5]

The sin is perhaps most famously described by the early Christian monk and ascetic,

Evagrius Ponticus, who shifted the meaning away from lack of care for the dead to a lack of care

for one's soul and salvation.[6] Evagrius understood the complexity of acedia well as

demonstrated by his description of it in the *Praktikos*:

> The demon of acedia, which is also called the noonday demon, is the most burdensome of all the demons. It besets the monk at about the fourth hour (10 AM) of the morning, encircling his soul until about the eighth hour (2 PM). First it makes the sun appear to slow down or stop, so the day seems to be fifty hours long. Then it forces the monk to keep looking out the window and rush from his cell to observe the sun in order to see how much longer it is to the ninth [hour, i.e. 3 PM], and to look about in every direction in case any of the brothers are there. Then it assails him with hatred of his place, his way of life and the work of his hands; that love has departed from the brethren and there is no one to console him. If anyone has recently caused the monk grief the demon adds this as well to amplify his hatred [of these things]. It makes him desire other places where he can easily find all that he needs and practice an easier, more convenient craft. After all, pleasing the Lord is not dependent on geography, the demon adds; God is to be worshipped everywhere. It joins to this the remembrance of the monk's family and his previous way of life, and suggests to him that he still has a long time to live, raising up before his eyes a vision of how burdensome the ascetic life is. So, it employs, as they say, every [possible] means to move the monk to abandon his cell and give up the race. No other demon follows on immediately after this one but after its struggle the soul receives in turn a peaceful condition and unspeakable joy.[7]

Evagrius was writing about the experiences of coenobitic monks in antiquity, but in the above

passage, we can begin to see some characteristics of acedia that are especially appropriate for

diagnosing transhumanism from a Christian perspective. Acedia brings about in the monk a

"hatred of his place, his way of life" and "It makes him desire other places where he can easily

find all that he needs." Additionally, the noon-day demon raises "up before [the monk's] eyes a

vision of how burdensome the ascetic life is," which for the non-monastic we can take to be the

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[4] Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of Our Times*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatiues Press, 2013): 27.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 28.

[7] Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, trans. Luke Dysinger, 12, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

burdensomeness of everyday life. Finally, Evagrius elsewhere ties an over concern with one's

health to acedia – a most fitting connection when discussing transhumanism.[8]

John Cassian, Evagrius' student, split the family of acedia into two genera, "one of which

sends those affected by it to sleep; while the other makes them forsake their cell and flee

away."[9] Thus, on Cassian's reckoning acedia should not be reduced to slothfulness understood

as laziness. Instead, it can manifest itself in active forms. To draw an analogy to psychiatry,

acedia is a kind of bipolar disorder: those experiencing it can either become depressed or

manic. Such an understanding is clarified when Cassian breaks the genera of acedia into

species, "laziness, sleepiness, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability both of mind

and body, chattering, inquisitiveness."[10] Here we see sins that constitute the kind of withdrawal

typical of definitions that collapse acedia into sloth, but we also see sins that are of an active

nature.

Definitions given by later theologians, such as Pope Gregory I and Thomas Aquinas, fail

to capture the ways in which acedia can manifest itself outside of the depressive and torpid.

That being said, Aquinas provides further insight into why acedia is a particularly harmful sin.

Acedia opposes the three cardinal theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. It "is opposed to

faith inasmuch as it is a lack of confidence in man's abilities to succeed, with God's grace, in his

vocation as a son in the Son."[11] It is opposed to hope because "It engenders despair; it causes a

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[8] Nault, 32–33.
[9] John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. C.S. Gibson, 5.11, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/350805.htm.
[10] Ibid. 5.16.
[11] Nault, 93.

person to flee from beatitude."[12] Finally, it opposes charity because by opposing faith and hope it opposes the "real union with the loved object," in this case God and neighbor.[13]

As will be shown below, the transhumanists are very active, but theirs is activity motivated by despair. They look into the future, and it is a future that appears to them as bleak and overwhelming because it is a future full of death. However, instead of being led by their despair to withdraw, to give up, they are striving to change that future by ridding the universe of death. For that reason, the way acedia is to be understood in what follows, is perhaps best summed up in part by writer Kathleen Norris. She argues that acedia is best understood as a state of restlessness brought about by failing to live in the present and seeing the future as overwhelming, to which we may add a lack of care for one's soul and, for our purposes here, an over concern for one's bodily health.[14] Acedia is a spurning of the gifts given by God and an inordinate desire to not "lead the life that Lord has assigned, to which God has called you."[15]

<center>Ancient Sin for Modern Technology</center>

To understand how this ancient sin is present in the modern age and modern technology, I will now turn to Aldous Huxley, an especially apt figure, given his works' place in the science fiction canon. After recalling the ways in which acedia was described in antiquity and the medieval period, Huxley makes the claim that "Accidie did not disappear with the monasteries and the Middle Ages. The Renaissance was also subject to it."[16] However, during the Renaissance there was a shift in understanding from acedia as a sin to acedia as a disease,

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (New York: Penguin, 2008): 1–6.
[15] 1 Cor. 7:17 (all Scriptural references are in the NRSV).
[16] Aldous Huxley, 'Accidie,' in *On the Margin: Notes and Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), 20.

which was then followed by "the nineteenth century and romanticism; and with them the triumph of the meridian demon."[17] Acedia is no longer a demon to be conquered or disease in need of a cure but "a literary virtue, a spiritual mode."[18] So powerful is the cocktail of futility, boredom, and despair mixed "with the complementary desire to be 'anywhere, anywhere out of the world,' or at least of the place in which one happens at the moment to be" that this valorized vice has "been the inspiration of poetry and the novel for a century and more."[19]

Turning from his description of acedia and its place in society, Huxley offers an explanation for the triumph of the noon-day demon. Every person "of the Romantic generation…who believed in liberty or whose adolescence had been intoxicated by the ideas of glory and genius" had acedia planted in his or her heart by "The failure of the French Revolution and the more spectacular downfall of Napoleon."[20] On the heels of this failure came the Industrial Revolution and with it "The discovery that political enfranchisement, so long and stubbornly fought for, was the merest futility and vanity so long as industrial servitude remained in force."[21] Next came the growing sense of displacement brought about by the rapid growth of cities, and then finally, World War I. To Huxley's list of tragedies, we may now add the Holocaust and other genocides, the Vietnam War, the War on Drugs, and the War on Terror, to name a few. Great disasters and disillusionments are nothing new, but according to Huxley "in no century have the disillusionments followed on one another's heels with such unintermitted rapidity."[22] This relentless buildup of disappointments led Huxley to the following

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[17] Ibid., 22.
[18] Ibid., 21–22.
[19] Ibid., 22–23.
[20] Ibid., 23–24.
[21] Ibid., 24.
[22] Ibid., 25.

conclusion, "The *mal du sciècle* was an inevitable evil; indeed, we can claim with a certain pride that we have a right to our accidie. With us it is not a sin or a disease of the hypochondries; it is a state of mind which fate has forced upon us."[23] In a sense, acedia is no longer optional but is the default modern mindset brought about by what is now over two hundred years of disillusionment.

Huxley provides a useful diagnosis, but other than acedia's impact on literature, he does not show how acedia has shaped the advancement of technology. In order to appreciate how transhumanism is a product of acedia, it will be useful to turn to the account of the rise of transhumanism offered by theologian Brent P. Waters. In *From Human to Posthuman,* Waters gives an expanded version of the history offered by Huxley. Waters begins by describing a shift in understanding from the universe as providentially ordered to the universe as fundamentally disordered.[24] This shift was brought about in large part by the disasters and disillusionments named by Huxley in addition to the developments of Darwinian evolution and Freudian psychology, the former supposedly showing that the development of life is chaotic and the latter revealing the same about the interior life.[25]

Left in a chaotic pit of despair, all moderns had left was "the [Nietzschean] will, and unlike previous generations humans now possessed the technological power to assert it more effectively. Moreover, if humans were to carve out for themselves a hospitable niche within a purposeless and directionless history, that power would be needed not only to master nature,

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World,* 1–15.

[25] Ibid.

but also to master, if not transform, human nature."[26] In other words, modern humans now see the world, including humans themselves, as raw material to be put to use in order to avoid sliding back into the abyss of non-being. This is because there is nothing special about being human, and there is no destiny to which we are headed. We were simply thrown into being by the forces of history from the Big Bang onward, and we are rushing head long towards our personal deaths, the extinction of humanity, and ultimately, the heat death of the universe.[27] In order to deal with our being towards nothingness, the transhumanist turn to technology as a means by which to overcome death in all its forms, to overcome the collapse back into the abyss.

To tie Waters' account back to the question of acedia, we can describe the turn to the will-to-power as expressed through technology as follows. Looking at the history of the world and of humanity in particular, the transhumanists despair of human life in its present form. It is too weak and too prone to break down. They look to the future and see one that is filled with more human weakness, more break down, more death. Whereas some might retreat into a kind of malaise in the face of the seeming meaninglessness of life and impending death, the transhumanists propose going on the offensive. Yet, the transhumanists are still guilty of acedia, albeit the active kind because they are failing to truly live in the present and desire to be "anywhere, anywhere out of the world."

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[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Ibid.

Nihilism and Acedia

The claim that transhumanists are Nietzschean is controversial. That being said, the appropriation of Nietzschean philosophy – intentionally and unintentionally – by transhumanists is indisputable.[28] Ironically, according to philosopher Nolen Gertz, the transhumanists perpetuate the kind of passive nihilism that Nietzsche, perhaps more so than any other philosopher in history, despised.[29] In turning to Gertz's work on the relationship between nihilism and technology, we can finish the diagnosis of acedia in transhumanism by seeing both the way in which passive nihilism and acedia overlap and the way that transhumanism is rooted in the kind of passive nihilism that Nietzsche found revolting. Additionally, Gertz's (and Nietzsche's) solution to the nihilism of transhumanism is a fulcrum for returning to Cassian's cure for acedia.

Gertz's definition of passive nihilism strongly resembles acedia, for as he notes, "[I]n everyday usage it is taken to mean something roughly equivalent to the expression: 'Who cares?'"[30] It means that a nihilist is both someone who does not care and someone who assumes that most everyone else shares in the same lack of care. This lack of care is most clearly seen in the avoidance of making decisions, which is a manifestation of the desire to be detached from the world.[31] Such a detachment is problematic because "To avoid making a decision, even a seemingly trivial decision, is to be detached from the world. Preferring to let others make decisions for us … is how we cut ourselves off from what makes our lives

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[28] See S.L. Sorgner, 'Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism,' *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (December 2008): 29-42. Also see Max More, 'The Overhuman in the Transhuman,' *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–5.

[29] Gertz, 17.

[30] Ibid., 13.

[31] Ibid.

meaningful."[32] Turning to Sartre, per Gertz, we see that one of the ways we detach ourselves from the world is by imagining the future in order to avoid dealing with the present. While the monk wracked by acedia wanted to flee his space, the nihilist wants to flee his or her time.

The danger of such a flight is that, "Life is lived in the present, not in the future, so to focus on the future in order to avoid the present is to essentially avoid having to live one's life."[33] Thus, ultimately for Gertz this tendency "leads us to turn against life, to embrace both opportunities to be distracted from life and ideologies – no matter how delusional – that promise us a way to a better life, even if such a life is to be found only through death."[34] Passive nihilism is perhaps best summed up by Gertz as, "How we unburden ourselves from the burden of being ourselves."[35] As mentioned above, the Greek for acedia carried with it an understanding of dehumanization in reference to neglect of the dead. Here with nihilism, we see the dehumanization of the living. Caring for ourselves is hard, so we stop caring. We embrace the lack of care, or perhaps more accurately, we let the lack of care embrace us with its tepid arms. Consequently, we become less than fully human due to us no longer living lives of intentionality: we no longer take pains with ourselves to live well, truthfully, and beautifully. For Nietzsche, this embrace of the lack of care is most clearly seen in the way that people readily accept the values of society without question because it is difficult to question those values and decide for oneself what should be valued.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 15.
[34] Ibid., 5.
[35] Ibid.

One of the main causes of passive nihilism is what Nietzsche calls "other worldly thinking," by which Nietzsche means metaphysical systems that posit a different and better world than this one.[36] The supposedly better world is accessible only through death which can either be actual death or the living death of ascetical practice. Passive nihilism, then, is driven by a desire to be "anywhere, anywhere out this world." Although Nietzsche famously identified Christianity as the progenitor of our collective nihilism – a history that I will not recount here – he also argued that the passive nihilism can be found in all domains of thought, even modern science.[37] It is this insight that allows Gertz to diagnosis human-technological relations as a set of passive nihilistic practices that perpetuate our nihilism by numbing us to our reality.[38] One of these practices, Gertz claims, is transhumanism.

At first, transhumanism seems to be a rebellion against passive nihilism. After all, transhumanism appears to align with Nietzsche's Übermensch or "over human." Nietzsche claimed that humanity is something to overcome, to conquer. However, what Nietzsche had in mind was an ethical-aesthetical project of reexamining values with the Übermensch being the person who is able to undertake the project of 'transvaluation' – valuing what is not valued and reevaluating that which is valued. That being said, a case can be made that the technological advancement proposed by transhumanists is in accord with Nietzsche's understanding of biology.[39]

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[36] Ibid. 21
[37] Ibid., 22.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Richardson. Also, Benjamin N. Parks, 'From the Waters of Babylon: *Frankenstein*, Transhumanism, and Cosmogony,' *Trinity Journal* 40 (December 2019), 197-214.

Debates on the nature of the overman aside, transhumanism is nihilistic for two

reasons. One, transhumanism accepts without question the moral rightness of technology. As

Gertz astutely notes, transhumanism is the mirror image of bioconservatism. Whereas the

latter accepts the natural as good simply because it is natural, the former accepts the

technological as good simply because it is technological. There is no attempt to evaluate and

weigh what is good and decide for oneself. Instead, there is the passive acceptance of a set of

values. Two, the human by which the transhumanists measure their projects is a future human

– a human that does not yet exist except in the minds of the transhumanists. This future human

is an otherworldly god to which the transhumanists turn for succor, and it dictates their

projects in much the same way that a more traditional deity dictates the projects of its

worshippers. In other words, the transhumanists swap out the Christian God for a new god that

is – on a Nietzschean view – just as fictitious and utopian.[40]

One final dimension of nihilism worth mentioning here is the human-nihilism relation

that Nietzsche termed "mechanical activity," although Gertz does not connect it directly to

transhumanism.[41] Whereas some people engage in "self-hypnosis" to avoid self-reflection,

other people keep themselves busy in order to avoid having to deal with themselves.

Furthermore, drawing on the insight of the French polymath Jacques Ellul, Gertz notes that

those engaged in mechanical activity do not choose what activity they are engaged in. Instead,

they follow the dictates of technology.[42] The busy work keeps people distracted from

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[40] It is important to keep in mind that otherworldly gods are not necessarily gods but any kind of way of thinking that draws one away from this world. In this way, the imagining of a transhumanist future is an otherworldly god insofar that it cultivates passive nihilism. Thus, even secular transhumanists have an otherworldly god even if it is in a sense atheistic.

[41] Gertz, 89.

[42] Ibid., 90–107.

themselves and the self-perpetuating nature of technology identified by Ellul removes the burden of having to decide which activities to engage in. We see this at work in Gertz's description of transhumanism recounted above: the transhumanists assume, not question, the inherent rightness of technological enhancement of human bodies, and here we can add that the nature of the activity is also assumed, not questioned, because it is selected for the transhumanists.

Gertz's critique of transhumanism as nihilistic can be translated into the language of acedia as follows. Transhumanists seek a flight into a future where all needs are easily met, and by so doing, fail to live in the present. They spurn the gift of this body and this life at this time in exchange for some other body and life in a future of their own imagining.[43] We see in the lack of care in accepting technology as inherently good, an over fixation on bodily health, and salvation of the soul falling by the wayside. Sometimes this lack of care manifests itself in mindless compulsive activities that distract us from ourselves.

<div align="center">Excursus: Examples of Acedia Amongst Transhumanists</div>

In order to show that the foregoing claims about acedia and transhumanism are not made from whole cloth, it will be necessary to provide examples of acedia amongst the transhumanists themselves. Common transhumanists traits that indicate a bondage to acedia are an understanding of human life as seemingly meaningless in the face of death – a death from which there is no escape because there is no immortal soul – and an obedience to

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[43] To be sure, Christians are interested in a future life. However, it is ultimately a future of God's determining, and it is a future that is patiently waited for in contrast to one feverishly brought about. This does not mean that we ignore human suffering here and now, but what it does mean is that we try to live a robustly human life now instead of constantly trying to redefine the human.

technology that encourages mechanical activity. The emphasis may be on cosmic death, the death of the species, or the individual as it is for Isaac Asimov, Nick Bostrom, and Ray Kurzweil respectively. The kinds of activities to engage in may be driven by society as with Asimov and Bostrom or by the individual as with Kurzweil.[44] In either case, there is a despair arising from the threat of death and the limitations of the human body that uncritically assumes that technological progress will solve all our problems.

Kurzweil is a shining example of acedia because unlike some advocates of transhumanism he very publicly lives a transhumanist lifestyle. Aside from his work as an inventor and executive at Google, Kurzweil is best known for his predictions about the future of technology. All through his boldest collection of predictions, *The Singularity is Near*, Kurzweil assumes that technology is good and further advancement will resolve all our problems, which means that we should not impede technological progress. Driving Kurzweil's desire for technological progress is his frustration with the limitations of the human body and his desire to be something (and someone) else somewhere else, a hallmark of acedia.[45] Finally, Kurzweil engages in mechanical activity aimed at prolonging his life until we reach a point that technology can keep him alive indefinitely. As an article once described him:

[44] Issac Asimov, 'The Last Question,' https://templatetraining.princeton.edu/sites/training/files/the_last_question_-_issac_asimov.pdf.
Nick Bostrom, 'The Fable of the Dragon Tyrant,' *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31, no. 5 (2005): 273-277.
Ray Kurzweil with Kristen Philipkoski, 'Ray Kurzweil's Plan: Never Die,' https://www.wired.com/2002/11/ray-kurzweils-plan-never-die/.
Bostrom, it should be noted, no longer considers himself a transhumanist and has distanced himself from the movement as of 2016. See, Mark O'Connell, *To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utipians, Hackers, and the Futurists Solving the Modest Problem of Death* (New York: Anchor Books, 2017), 80.
For more on communal versus individualistic transhumanist visions see Ilia Stambler, 'Life extension – a conservative enterprise? Some fin-de-siècle and early twentieth-century precursors of transhumanism,' *Journal of Evolution & Technology* 21, no. 1 (March 2010): 13-26.
[45] Kurzweil

Ray Kurzweil doesn't tailgate. A man who plans to live forever doesn't take chances with his health on the highway, or anywhere else. As part of his daily routine, Kurzweil ingests 250 supplements, eight to 10 glasses of alkaline water and 10 cups of green tea. He also periodically tracks 40 to 50 fitness indicators, down to his "tactile sensitivity." Adjustments are made as needed. "I do actually fine-tune my programming," he said.[46]

That was in 2005. Now, due to advances in technology and nutrition, he only takes one hundred supplements. Still, his diet and other health maintenance practices are just as highly regulated if not more so, all to the tune of about a thousand dollars a day.[47] If that does not count as an over concern with health indicating acedia, then it is unclear what exactly Evagrius could have had in mind.

Other concrete examples of acedia amongst transhumanists abound in Mark O'Connell's *To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists Solving the Modest Problem of Death*. In O'Connell's interviews with various transhumanists a pattern emerges: precocious teen becomes depressed by the failures of the human body and the prospect of death while at the same time becoming enamored with technology. Additionally, a large reason why these men – they are almost all men – become captivated by technology is an early love of science fiction and the otherworldly futures that it prophesies. The pattern holds whether the transhumanist in question is a do-it-yourself biohacker scraping by in a basement laboratory in a dilapidated house or is a well off and highly educated entrepreneur like Max More or Zoltan Istvan.

Lest the counterclaim be made that the above examples are all from secular transhumanists and that Christian Transhumanists are able to avoid acedia because of their

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[46] Associated Press, 'Never Say Die: Live Forever,' http://www.wired.com/news/medtech/0,1286,66585,00.html?tw=wn_tophead_3, accessed November 9, 2019.

[47] Eric Brodwin, 'The 700-calorie breakfast you should eat if you want to live forever, according to a futurist who spends $1 million a year on pills and eating right,' *Business Insider*, https://www.businessinsider.com/ray-kurzweils-immortality-diet-2015-4.

faith, it is necessary to provide an example from the latter group. As David C. Winyard has

pointed out, the Christian Transhumanists are a group without firm definitive theological

positions.[48] That being said, Micah Redding is perhaps as representative a Christian

Transhumanist as there can be since he is the founder of the Christian Transhumanist

Association.[49] Redding is a somewhat prolific blogger and Facebook page moderator, and

acedia is as present in his work as it is in the aforementioned secular transhumanists', albeit

subtly.

Redding embraces many of the transhumanists' beliefs especially their nearly blind

optimism in technological progress. However, he couches his transhumanism in Christian

language, which at first blush makes his version of transhumanism seem acceptable to

Christians. For example, he has a strong disliking for what he calls "escapist" forms of

Christianity.[50] Presumably, what he means by "escapist" are expressions of Christianity that

ignore present suffering for pie-in-the-sky thinking—the kind of Christian thinking that

Nietzsche despised. Redding also insists that humans play a part in the unfolding of Christ's

victory.[51] So far, so good. However, the cracks for the meridian devil to enter start appearing

when Redding insists that humans will participate in the final resurrection of the dead. To be

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[48] David C. Winyard, 'Transhumanism: Christian Destiny or Distraction?,' *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (April 23, 2019), 8–16.

[49] I have chosen to focus on Redding and not someone like Ted Peters or Ron Cole-Turner for a number of reasons. Chief among them is that Redding by virtue of his social media presence has greater influence than the academics he draws on. Also, as someone who is not an academic per se, his thinking provides insight into what is going on at a more popular level and thus, is a better representation of the broader movement. This is similar to why I focused on Kurzweil when discussing secular transhumanists and not someone like Julian Savelescu. Moreover, the thought of Christian Transhumanists that are academics, like Cole-Turner, requires an entire essay or more.

[50] Micah Redding, '5 Theses for the Next Reformation,' http://micahredding.com/blog/5-theses-for-the-next-reformation.

[51] Micah Redding, 'The Resurrection is Participatory,' http://micahredding.com/blog/the-resurrection-is-participatory.

sure, it is a fundamental tenet of Christianity that there will be a final resurrection. However, Redding supposes that we will not only have the resurrection happen to us but we will be the ones resurrecting the dead.[52]

The problem with such a line of thinking from a Christian perspective is that the resurrection of the dead is a wholly Divine prerogative. If humans were capable of breaking the bonds of death themselves, then it is pointless to answer Anselm's question – *cur Deus homo*? Humans may call upon God to raise the dead as the apostles did, but it is ultimately God who acts or not. To suggest, as Redding does, that the miraculous resurrections in Scripture somehow justify the resurrection as a techno-scientific project is to express an understanding of causation and Divine-human relations that is more akin to magic than either miracles or science.[53] Furthermore, his appeal to Christ's human nature as a justification does not hold on Biblical grounds because Christ did not raise Himself from the dead.

Instead, it was the Father and the Spirit who raised Him from the dead.[54] Certain verses in John's Gospel claim that Jesus Himself had a role in his own resurrection, but even if He was also the subject and not just the object of resurrection it would have been because of His Divine nature.[55] If His human nature played a role in His resurrection, then it would mean that God lacked something in His Nature to carry out His work of resurrecting Jesus.[56] Instead, Jesus'

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[52] Micah Redding, 'The Resurrection is Technological,' http://micahredding.com/blog/the-resurrection-is-technological.

[53] Benjamin N. Parks, 'Simon Says: On the Magical Impulse of Empirical Studies on Intercessory Prayer,' *Christian Bioethics* 25, no. 1 (April 2019).

[54] Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1. All Scripture is quoted from the NRSV.

[55] Jn. 2:18-19; 10:18.

[56] Which is a scary thought because if God is lacking anything in His nature there is the prospect for change in God. In turn, this means that we have no sure hope that history will form the kind of God who would want to resurrect us.

took on human nature not to show that He wants us to enact a project of scientific resuscitation but to heal human nature. Moreover, this healing took place by his life and his passion—his passivity in the face of death – in which He was perfectly obedient to the Father.[57]

Christ's passion is worth brief reflection here. Christ conquered death by entering into death. As the ancient Eastern Christian hymn "Christ is Risen" declares, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death, and upon those in the tombs, giving life!" That death was defeated by death is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. Having defeated death, Christ has all authority over life and death. Thus, the Christian has nothing to fear and ultimately no reason to try and develop technology to resurrect the dead. Furthermore, the path to resurrection for the Christian is through faith as Christ said, "This indeed is the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."[58] By placing our trust in God as we go to our deaths, we imitate by grace the Son's obedience and in so doing secure our resurrection.

In order to avoid the charge that he is baptizing Prometheus, Redding argues that his proposed scientific project of resurrection is in fact an expression of humanity being made in the image of God. He does so by claiming that the image of God consists in our being technological creatures, of being "created co-creators" – language first popularized by the process theologian Philip Hefner.[59] As he writes:

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[57] For more on how Christ's being "turned over" is an entrance into passivity see W.H. Vanstone, *The Stature of Waiting* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2006)

[58] Jn. 6:40.

[59] Some readers with a bit of knowledge about the Christian transhumanist movement will be wondering why I do not engage with the idea of humans being 'created co-creators.' Space does not permit the kind of engagement that would be necessary to give the concept its due. Here, I will simply suggest that the concept is slippery and dangerous, and if it is carefully nuanced and given a more proper Christian understanding, it does not really say

Genesis 1 commissions humanity to go into all the Earth, exploring, gardening and bringing peace and order to a chaotic world. They are to get their start gardening in Eden, and then extend those skills to all creation, tending to and cultivating birds, fish, animals, Earth itself. This is science and technology in their most embryonic forms. Humanity is not only commissioned to cultivate life, they are *equipped* to cultivate life. Unlike other creatures, humans are able to contemplate and understand natural processes, and then create new things—new technologies—to manage and use those processes. This is part of what it means for humans to be made in the image of the creator. Our incredible ability to contemplate non-existent possibilities, and bring new things into existence, is what has given us unprecedented power on the Earth.[60]

The ableist implications of functional understandings of the *imago Dei* aside, Redding's description of being made in the image of God leaves one wondering how much of his account is a glorification of human abilities over against the call to be like Christ who is "the image of the invisible God."[61]

Given the above quote and his repeated claims throughout his blog of human agency and human power to one day resurrect the dead, it seems that Redding is susceptible to the criticism that the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev leveled towards Nikolai Federov and the Russian Cosmists – proto-transhumanists who, like Redding, thought that the resurrection of the dead was a technological undertaking.[62] Space does not permit a detailed description of the similarities between Redding and the Russian Cosmists, so five will have to suffice: an overconfidence in scientific knowledge, belief that the pursuit of scientific resurrection is the Christian vocation, that resurrecting the dead is an obligation of love for those who have died before us, preaching the gospel of scientific resurrection instead of the Gospel of Christ's victory, and an almost exclusive focus on bodily, not spiritual, death.

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anything original or helpful. If any Christian is going to use such an understanding of the *imago Dei* (s)he should first engage Augustine's thought on the matter as it is given in *City of God* XII.26.

[60] Redding, 'The Resurrection is Technological.'

[61] Col. 1:15.

[62] For more on the Russian Cosmists see Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers*. Also see Bernstein, *The Future of Immortality: Remaking Life and Death in Contemporary Russia*.

After examining Federov's writings, Berdyaev writes:

> It is possible to surmise, that for Fedorov man is primarily a bodily, a material physical being and with the body a spiritual life is impossible. Resurrection for him is always a resurrection of the body, and it is attainable by bodily means. Fedorov does not at all offer any explanation to the question about matter and the material body. For the philosophy of Christianity this is a very complex question. Hardly would it be possible to support the idea of resurrection merely in the material, physical body.[63]

The scientific resurrection proposed by Redding and Federov contrasts with the true and final resurrection shown in Christ's resurrection. As Berdyaev continues, "The body, in which Christ was resurrected, could not be a merely material physical body, – this was a luminous and transfigured body, more refined, having conquered every bodily burden, indeed a spiritual body." What Fedorov offers is a resuscitated body, not a redeemed person, because it lacks the spiritual dimension. In ignoring the spiritual dimension, "Fedorov very much narrows down the meaning of the mystery of redemption. Redemption for him is completely replaced by resurrection. But redemption is likewise a new birth of man; it is both immanent and transcendent all at once."[64] Ultimately this means that:

> Fedorov quite understates the significance of Christ's grace in the deed of resuscitation. His truth is in this, that he emphasised the activity of man and the immanent character of resuscitation but this truth cannot be torn asunder from its other side, from the power of the grace of Christ, in which and through which only there is also possible for man both resurrection and resuscitation.[65]

In focusing on just the body and leaving aside the spirit, Fedorov and Redding cannot offer a truly resurrected person. The best they can offer is a resuscitated corpse. They can offer us the resuscitation of Lazarus not the resurrection of Christ.

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[63] Nikolai Berdyaev, 'The Religion of Resuciative Resurrection,' http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1915_186.html, accessed November 10, 2019.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

Here Redding's acedia finally comes into relief. In promoting the same view of resurrection as Federov amongst other transhumanist tropes, he displays the over concern for bodily health and the lack of care for the soul characteristic of acedia. Furthermore, by insisting that death will be defeated by our efforts, he betrays a lack of trust in Christ to resurrect the dead. The only reason to wage total war against death would be if for some reason he doubts that the victory has already been won and our participation in this victory is passing through death with confidence. In addition to this lack of trust, his over fixation on the death of the body brings about a lack of concern for the spiritual life and draws him away from beatitude. This lack of trust and lack of concern for the spiritual will ultimately result in a lack of true communion with God. Thus, we see sins against faith, hope, and charity, which are the ultimate danger of acedia.

<div align="center">Ancient Virtue for Modern Technology</div>

Nietzsche proposes active nihilism as the cure for passive nihilism. Whereas passive nihilism is the state of not caring, active nihilism is the repudiation of the "taken-for-granted nature of our values" and is "a sign of increased power of the spirit."[66] Although the average Christian may not want to completely overthrow Christian morality as Nietzsche wanted, the kind of bold living and love of fate that Nietzsche proposes as the solution to passive nihilism is a useful gesture towards the need to cultivate the virtue Cassian proposed as the antidote to acedia: courage. Allegorizing the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, he writes:

> Each fault has its own special corner in the heart, which it claims for itself in the recesses of the soul, and drives out Israel, i.e., the contemplation of holy and heavenly things, and never ceases to oppose them. For virtues cannot possibly live side by side with faults … That which had been wasted by accidie, will at once be tilled by courage.[67]

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[66] Gertz, 23.
[67] Cassian, 5.23.

However, Cassian does not provide a definition of courage, nor does he specify what courageous living looks like. Therefore, we must turn elsewhere to further understand how courage can counteract acedia.

In Plato's *Laches*, the titular character defines courage as "a certain endurance of the soul."[68] Socrates rejects Laches' definition because sometimes the prudent thing to do in battle is flee, and Laches' definition would result in a conflict between the virtues of prudence and courage.[69] Nevertheless, courage as perseverance reappears in *The Republic* but nuanced to mean a perseverance through emotions, not a steadfastness in front of an enemy.[70] Aristotle in turn famously places courage as the mean between cowardice and recklessness.[71] Later, Aquinas gives his great synthesis by identifying courage as fortitude, strength of mind.[72] The purpose of fortitude is to allay fear and moderate daring in line with Aristotle's understanding of courage, but it is no longer primarily about combat.[73] Instead, for Aquinas the emphasis is on endurance in the face of danger whether it be physical or spiritual.

Having defined courage, we can now begin to see why Cassian proposed it as the cure for acedia. Although the monk's "struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh," his situation is analogous.[74] Whereas acedia tempts the monk to avoid his situation either by

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[68] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 8, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955): 192b, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Lach.+192b&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0176.

[69] Ibid., 192c-193d.

[70] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev.C.D.C Reeve, in *Platon: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, 1061–1075.

[71] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), III.6.

[72] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3123.htm.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Eph. 6:12.

withdrawing or fleeing, courage demands that the monk remains where he is at, that he

perseveres, that he has the fortitude to endure the test. Importantly, courage in the face of

acedia is obtained through prayer not a naked act of the will.[75] In the struggle against the

principalities, Paul the Apostle tells us to "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and

supplication," and the monk must ask for courage or otherwise he will not have it "because [he]

does not ask."[76] Prayer is an apt practice for cultivating fortitude not only because God could

instantaneously infuse the virtue but also because by praying we enter into communion with

God and begin to see ourselves and our place in the world correctly.[77] Once we see our

situation rightly in relation to God, it will become easier to abide and not withdraw or flee

because we understand why it is that we are here now in this world and not anywhere out of

the world.

Turning to the way that acedia presents itself in transhumanism, we can begin to

describe the shape that courage takes. Transhumanism challenges the goodness of the human

body and of human life in general. In place of our current lives and bodies, transhumanism

wants us to pursue lives and bodies that are non-existent, otherworldly. It wants us to

frantically work to radically alter our very existence. Put simply. transhumanism wants us to

become unmoored from our life and run away. In the face of this temptation, we ought to

embrace our lives with a steadfast fervor. Loving and caring for this body at this time with these

other people. We should put down roots and seek out the good, the true, and the beautiful

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[75] Nault, 95.
[76] Eph. 6:18 and James 4:2
[77] Augustine's *Confessions* are an excellent example of how prayer allows one to understand one's place in the cosmos correctly.

here and now instead of constantly looking for them in some other time and place. To be sure, Christians do posit a future perfection, but we also acknowledge that this world and our current bodies are good gifts – the corruption of sin notwithstanding. To claim that these gifts are deficient and there are better forms that we can create so long as we abandon our current one is to spurn what God has given us.

Even with all the necessary definitions, the foregoing discussion of courage is still not entirely helpful. The reason it is not helpful is because we learn the virtues more by seeing them exemplified by the virtuous person than we do didactically. Without the virtuous person to show us how to live courageously when under attack by the noon-day demon, we are left with nothing more than the advice to endure and pray, which is good but not entirely helpful. However, by turning to Christ as our exemplar, we find a perfect example of the kind of courage that counters the acedia of transhumanism because in the Incarnation we see a radical embrace of a particular body at a particular time.

It is not necessarily a courageous thing to live a human life because none of us have a say in the matter, but for the Son it is different. He knew what living a human life from conception to death would entail. First, He would have to enter into Mary's womb where life is exceptionally fragile. Then, He would live as an infant and toddler in 1st century Palestine. Two precarious periods of life made all the more precarious by the era in which He would live. Again, none of us get a say in our gestation, infancy, and toddling, but He did. He chose to live that life because it was the "fullness of time."[78] He did not withdraw from it, nor did He flee

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[78] Gal. 4:4-7.

elsewhere looking for something better. He remained in the time and place chosen for Him from before the foundation of the world.

In time, He would have worked with Joseph as a skilled laborer. Although none of His bones were broken, it is likely He would have added some cuts, abrasions, and bruises to the ones He collected in childhood. That is to say nothing of the soreness caused by hard labor, or the eventual pains of not having a place to lay His head. Being fully human, it is more than likely He experienced other ailments like the common cold, diarrhea, or mosquito bites. Yet, he did not withdraw; He did not flee.

When He began His ministry, the demon of acedia would have reared its head all the more. There would have been countless times and countless reasons to despair: He was rejected by His hometown, opposed by His family, and constantly misunderstood. He could have given up, but he did not. He could have won His kingdom by submission to the devil or by force, but He did not. Instead, He spent time in prayer, and prepared Himself to conquer the principalities by the means that the Father had ordained. Turning towards Jerusalem, He did not withdraw; He did not flee.

The mid-day devil came at midnight. He could have let the cup pass. He did not. He prayed. He faced His passion with courage. He could have called down angels. He did not. He prayed. He faced His death with courage. He did not withdraw; He did not flee, neither should we.

### Conclusion

Transhumanism is the spawn of acedia. As such, it is opposed to faith, hope, and charity, which means that it is ultimately opposed to real union between humans and God. Union with

God is the very reason that Christ became man. By becoming Incarnate, He married the Divine nature to the human nature. Additionally, in His courageous life He conquered acedia, and He showed us how we too can conquer acedia. What is more is that in His death and resurrection, He gives us all the more reason to live with confidence because He secured our ultimate victory over death. What is left to us is to work out our salvation by loving and using the gifts He has graciously given us – these bodies and this lifetime, not some other bodies in a future life—to worship and love Him and our neighbors.

"I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." – Revelation 22:13

"Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it." – Song of Songs 8:7a[1]

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." – 1 John 4:18

## Care-Less Enchantment

Returning to Josephson-Storm, we can better appreciate in part how it is that enchantments have survived into our supposedly disenchanted age: we simply do not care. We simply accept the vision of the world that is handed to us, and what is handed to us is the Chaoskampf in its modern techno-scientific form. In light of the threat posed by chaos, everything seems to truly be subjected to futility, unless of course, we find a way to control chaos and bend it to our wills. Technology and science promises just such control. In a state of despair before the overwhelming threat of chaos, we do not question the rightness of modern technology and the way it shapes us.

The kind of control that is promised is mechanistic, and this mechanistic mindset is a contagion that infects all aspects of our lives. Our understanding of the world, physical as well as spiritual, is reduced to the mechanistic one. When this understanding turns to religious practices, magic is born, or in this case, reborn in the modern age. As mentioned above not all the researchers studying the effects of intercessory prayer are Christians or even religious, and not all of them were out to prove that prayer is ineffective. Instead, some are seeking a way to control some force or power that is not necessarily a personal deity. It is easy to see how

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[1] KJV

someone who is a non-religious scientist can arrive at the conclusion that one should study

prayer and find a way that it can be used as a means to control chaos. There is some force we

do not fully understand, but many people throughout the ages have claimed to be able to use

this force to do extraordinary things, even cheat death and stave off the collapse back into

chaos.

As was seen with *Frankenstein*, the turn to the purportedly modern scientific worldview

was actually a turn to an ancient worldview that had been supplanted by Christianity. Chapter 3

focused on cosmogony and its implications for technology and anthropology, but the same

pattern of a modern advance that is really a retreat back into history can be seen in the move

to a purely mechanistic understanding of control over the world. The only difference now is

that we try to directly control nature instead of trying to first gain control over a certain god or

goddess through an incantation or sacrifice. Magicians never went away: they just traded robes

for lab coats.

Circling back around to acedia, it is an ancient sin, but what sets it apart in our time is

its prevalence. Acedia is our sin par execrable. Yet, at bottom our embrace of acedia is not too

different than the acceptance of fate common in ancient pagan cultures. For modern humans,

the forces of nature which bring things into being out of the primordial chaos and then drag

them back down, determine our lives and destinies. For ancient humans, the stars wheel far

above us and the sign a person is born under determines his or her life, or maybe the oracle is

consulted and a prophesy – often self-fulfilling – is given that cannot be changed: the

abandoned son will always unwittingly kill his father. In both modern and ancient models,

humanity is subjected to impersonal forces that determine our lives. The only difference in

regards to acedia is that the ancients had a more depressive response whereas the moderns have a more manic one - same sin, different responses.

Again, we do not have to give into acedia. We do not have to imagine the world as violently coming into being out of chaos. The world was not created thusly. The world was not created in the crucible of the Chaoskampf, but in a Person. A Person born under a star that destroyed astrology and every purely mechanistic understanding of the world and human destiny. Love, personal love, became flesh and affirmed the goodness of the created order and displayed the fullness of love that created the world and orders it to good. More on that below, but first, a brief overview of plans for future work.

## Future Work

Each of the three of the articles compromising the body of this work is a seed of a larger project. "A Thousand and One Thebadian Noons" is the start of what I plan to be a series of articles and journal issues exploring harmitology, eschatology, virtue, and classical Christian theism in relation to bioethics. Already, I am preparing an article on moral bioenhancement and *apatheia* tentatively titled, "Highway to Cocytus:  On *Apatheia*, Moral Bioenhancement, and the Passions*"* for a special issue of *Christian Bioethics*. In that article, I will examine the difference between a Christian understanding of *apatheia* and the kind of moral bioenhacment advocated for by the likes of Julian Savulescu in their approach to the passions. The main thrust will be that only the traditional understanding of *apatheia* in Christian spirituality can provide a grammar for moral improvement that both brings about real moral improvement in the ways that matter most and is truly human. I also plan to write a companion piece that will use the insights of that article to the manga series *Full Metal Alchemist* for the journal *Mechacedmia*

*Second Arc*, a peer-reviewed journal on manga and anime studies. In addition to these articles and others that are currently only fragments on an overgrowing list of ideas, I am going to propose a series of issues for *Christian Bioethics* that will ask submitters to take up issues in bioethics in light of the classical divine attributes: the omnis, alpha-privatives, and simplicity.

While the project inaugurated with Chapter 2 is still taking shape, future work expanding Chapters 3 and 4 is clearer in my mind.  I intend to expand "From the Waters of Babylon" into a book. I envision there being two halves. The first will contain a more robust exploration of mythology and the difference between the ontology of violence coming from the *Chaoskampf* and the ontology of love coming from creation ex nihilo. There will also be a more robust genealogy of the *Chaoskampf* from antiquity to the present day since that is something I did not do in the essay. I will also give a fuller justification for privileging Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus over Heidegger because even though Heidegger's interpretation is idiosyncratic, his stature in the philosophy of technology demands that he be reckoned with. The second half will be the positive project in which I will show the grounds for a philosophy and theology of technology rooted in the ontology of love and what that might look like in practical, pastoral terms.

I also plan on applying the insights of "Simon Says" to other areas of research on the health effects of religious practices. In addition to prayer, there have been studies on a whole host of practices such as Scripture reading, fellowship, listening to religious radio, and so on. Many of these studies have the same kind of issues that the studies on intercessory prayer have namely magical thinking that believes doing such things will secure positive Divine action. One of the leading places for this kind of research is the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health

at Duke University, which is led by Harold G. Koenig. I envision this project compromising a series of articles critiquing these studies on methodological and theological grounds, drawing out the implications of such thinking for religious practice and medicine, and proposing alternatives for thinking about the relationship of religious practice and health.

On the subject of magical thinking, I also want to step outside the bounds of bioethics and explore the relationship between magical thinking that persists in Christianity and what has been dubbed the pedagogy of fear: the historically dominate form of evangelism and exhortation that at bottom is more fixated on hell than heaven. My suspicion is that acedia is more common than we think amongst Christians, and it is fueled by "the iconography of the Last Judgement" that gave "more and more prominence … to its ominous and frightening aspects, which obviously held more fascination for artists than the splendour of hope, often all too well concealed beneath the horrors."[2] The fear and uncertainty – not hope – of the final judgment coupled with the dominant understanding of causation in our scientific age infects theology and religious practice such that magical thinking becomes prevalent – the Sinner's Prayer most be said just so, Mass must be celebrated *ad* this or that way, we must reject anything "Latin" and accept all things "Greek" (really Slavic) or else God will not give us grace, remove His favor from us, and damn us forever.[3] Admittedly, this project is in the ruminative phase and may be too unoriginal and personal to ever come to fruition.

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[2] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §41, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html, accessed March 27, 2020.
[3] The list would be endless if I wrote out all the things that Christians of all traditions – including me – have thought would secure them the grace of God as if God does not want to be gracious and must somehow be tricked, overpowered, or trapped.

That is all in the future. At this point, I owe the reader some sort of solution to the fear

mentioned in Chapter 2 and the troublesome enchantments of the *Chaoskampf* and magical

thinking. Thus far I have avoided giving any kind of robust solution whether theoretical or

practical to the problems explored above. This has been the case as much because of cowardice

as it has been page limitations in publishing or time in a semester. It is far easier to deconstruct

than it is to build. In the next few pages, I want to sketch out the beginning of a solution. First, I

will propose a practical solution drawn from Augustine. Second, I will offer a more conceptual

theological solution that is in a way an application of the practical.

## The Beauty of Cock Fights and Outhouses

A good number of techo-skeptics in the past century have tried to counter the power of

technology by proposing some form of alternative action. Ellul suggested anarchy as the

solution, but was ultimately so pessimistic about our ability to fully escape technique that for

him only the Lord could free us: he was such a pessimistic Calvinist that he became a

universalist.[4] Albert Borgmann suggests focal practices.[5] Jacob Shatzner suggests sharing

communal meals in intentional Christian community, a sort of revitalization of the love meals

out of which the Eucharistic liturgy grew.[6] Waters, drawing on Hannah Arendt, suggests a turn

to natality.[7] Gertz, as mentioned above, suggests the bold living of active nihilism. Bishop

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[4] Ellul is somewhat longwinded, so to fully get what he means see: Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey M. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) and Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City,* trans. Dennis Pardee (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011). The latter is a counter weight to *The Technological Society*.

[5] Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 196-210.

[6] Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 170-178.
Only a Southern Baptist would suggest pot lucks as a solution.

[7] Brent Waters, *This Mortal Flesh: Incarnation and Bioethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 131-148.

suggests a reformation of the imagination by participating in Christian, specifically Eastern

Orthodox, liturgical practices.[8] Then there are the outright rejections of technology both

pacifistic, as with the Amish, and violent as with the brilliant mathematician and failed MKUltra

test subject Theodore Kaczynzki.

Other than the last two, I agree with all the other suggestions. The problem of

technology generally and transhumanism particularly is multifaceted and, accordingly, needs a

multifaceted response. What I want to suggest is that what is needed in addition to the

proposed solutions is a reformation of the imagination via the liberal arts. As Augustine argues

in *On Order*, the liberal arts are the means by which we can begin to glimpse the orderliness of

creation that is maintained by God who is working everything to a good end.

*On Order*, written shortly after his conversion, is dedicated to Augustine's friend

Zenobius. The main concern of the book is stated at the start, "There is an order to be found,

within things and between them, which binds and directs this world. To attain and retain that

order, Zenobius, to open one's eyes and other people's to it, it is difficult and very

uncommon."[9] Various questions regarding order are pursued especially the origin of evil and

what role it may play in order. For the sake of maintaining focus, I will not recount the twists

and turns of every argument in the dialog. Suffice it to say that from the start and all through

out, Augustine is adamant that God created and sustains an orderly world. He likens those who

think the world is disorderly to a person who complains about seemingly disorganized tiling

when looking at what is really a mosaic: they fail to see the order because their perspective is

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[8] Jeffrey P. Bishop, "Technics and Liturgics," *Christian Bioethics* 26, no. 1 (April 2020): 12-30,
https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbz016.
[9] Augustine, *On Order,* trans. Silvano Borruso (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 1.1

too narrow.[10] Now, it is hard to see the whole mosaic, especially when one is looking at it

through a dark mirror.[11] This then is where the liberal arts enter.

The liberal arts serve to expand this perception. By seeing the order within a given

discipline and the way that the disciplines link together in an orderly fashion – logic to math to

music for example – the student becomes ordered within his or her heart and soul.

Consequently, he or she is then prepared to see the orderliness of the world as a whole. Yet,

the reduction of the pursuit of the liberal arts to something useful for personal material

advancement was as much a problem in Augustine's day as it is in our own with STEAM. Given

this temptation, the liberal arts if they are going to be truly illuminating and lift our hearts and

minds to God they must be pursued alongside living and praying well.[12] The liberal arts must be

pursued *Christo et Regno Ejus* and *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*.[13]

Once this orderliness, which is beautiful, is seen everything can lift our minds to God,

and we will not be shaken by the perceived injustice of certain circumstances such as those

surrounding the begetting and reception of children.[14] At one point Augustine and his

companions witness a naturally occurring cockfight. Even with all the blood and feathers,

Augustine was still able to find beauty in the struggle. As he writes, "There was nothing amiss in

every motion of those irrational beasts. There was clearly another Reason controlling

everything from on high, down to the universal law of victor and vanquished. The first crowed

triumph … the other had ended up with a featherless neck, voiceless, and crippled. I don't know

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[10] Ibid.

[11] 1 Cor. 13:12

[12] Augustine, *One Order*, 19.51

[13] The mottos of Wheaton College and Saint Louis University respectively, although it is questionable how much longer SLU can use their motto with a straight face.

[14] Augustine, *On Order,* 19.51

how, but everything was a hymn to the beauty and harmony of nature."[15] To use a more

humorous example, just before the cock fight, we learn that even the outhouse is a place of

Divine presence and not outside of God's order, so it is perfectly appropriate to sing Psalms

while defecating *pace* Monica.[16].

Seeing such beauty should then free us from the fear of evil because it does not stand

outside of order like Tiamat. We should be better able to sit still like the unshakeable just man

and not attempt to flee because there is nowhere else better to which to flee. Creation is good

and beautiful. There is no other world to build or to get back to as Bacon thought. Additionally,

we should realize that Divine action transcends all human action so that magical control of God

is impossible. Thus, the liberal arts properly studied and the change of imagination they bring

about can provide a counter to the enchantments of technology.

No author in the past hundred or so years understood the kind of perspective of which

Augustine wrote than Flannery O'Connor.  In "Introduction to a Memoir of Mary Ann" O'Connor

writes the following while discussing the tendency amongst moderns to view a life filled with

suffering as one not worth living:

> One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and
> once you have discredited His goodness, you are done with Him … Ivan Karamazov cannot believe, as long
> as one child is in torment; Camus' hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ, because of the massacre of
> the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss in vision. If other ages felt
> less, they saw more, even if they saw with the blind, prophetical, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which
> is to say, of faith.[17]

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[15] Ibid. 8.25

[16] Ibid. 8.22

[17] Flannery O'Connor, "Introduction to A Memoir of Mary Ann," in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works*, ed. Sally
Fitzgerald (New York: The Library of America), 830-831.
I have written elsewhere on the implications of this quote for disability. See, Benjamin N. Parks, "The Case for
Conserving Monsters: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and the Body of Christ," *Journal of Disability and Religion* 24,
no. 1 (2020): 89-103, https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2019.1682103.

Here O'Connor is underselling what the eye of faith sees in accepting that God is ordering the world such that even that which is unintelligible to us will ultimately make sense. Elsewhere she shows us what kind of a world this eye sees, and it is terrifying. It is terrifying because it is a world in which God hunts down sinners to enact justice and bring about repentance. As O'Connor points out time and again, grace is violent. Almost all her stories are variations of Augustine watching the cock fight in so far that she is able to see God's grace in even the most horrific of events: a drowning as a baptism, a stroke as transfiguration, a goring bull as Christ, etc.[18]

The eye of faith is not some abstract concept. For O'Connor it is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.[19] Likewise, for Augustine the ascent to God that the liberal arts aid in is impossible without Christ.[20] This means that the answer for the problems examined above is the childlike one, the quintessential Sunday School answer: Jesus. In other words, the answer is love. As Charles Wesley penned, "Jesus, thou art all compassion. Pure unbounded love thou art."[21]

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[18] "The River," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "Greenleaf," respectively. All can be found in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works.*
One day an article will need to be written to explore the possibility of universalism, at least of the Balthazarian "hopeful" kind, being latent in O'Connor's work, especially her later stories. I suspect that it is considering that no one, not even the worst characters, dies condemned. Moreover, she publicly wrote of her admiration for Teilhard de Chardin, going so far as to refer to him as "the most important nonfiction writer" and used a quote of his for the title a story and her last collection of stories – "Everything that Rises Must Converge." Such public praise would have been surprising at the time considering his books were on their way to the Index and Henri de Lubac had not yet finished writing his defenses of Teilhard. Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 571.
[19] "Introduction to A Memoir of Mary Ann," 831
[20] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 10.43
[21] Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,"
https://hymnary.org/text/love_divine_all_love_excelling_joy_of_he, accessed March 28, 2020.

<u>Love Divine, All Loves Excelling</u>

In order to reimagine love, we must begin by properly understanding that it is not primarily an emotion and is most definitely not an emotion of the saccharine variety. Love, that which God is in His very essence, is not an emotion since God is, according to the classical understanding, impassible. What constitutes divine love is described well by David Bentley Hart in explaining how love can be equated with impassibility:

> Is it not the case that once we have admitted love into our definition of [impassibility] we have thus rendered it unintelligible, inasmuch as love is a reaction evoked by what one suffers of another? To state the matter simply—No: love is not primordially a reaction, but the possibility of every action, the transcendent act that makes all else actual; it is purely positive, sufficient in itself, without the need of any galvanism of the negative to be fully active, vital, and creative. This is so because the ultimate truth of love is God himself, who creates all things solely for his pleasure, and whose act of being is infinite. And this is why love, when it is seen in its truly divine depth, is called *apatheia*. If this seems an odd claim to us now, it is largely because we are so accustomed to thinking of love as one of the emotions, one of the passions, one of those spontaneous or reactive forces that rise up in us and spend themselves on various objects of impermanent fascination; and of course for us "love" often is just this. But, theologically speaking, at least according to the dominant tradition, love is not, in its essence, an emotion—a pathos— at all: it is life, being, truth, our only true wellbeing, and the very ground of our nature and existence.[22]

Love as the very ground of our nature and existence, love as our (well)being, and love as life counters magic, chaos, and fear respectively.

Since God is the very ground of our nature and existence, a claim deriving from the doctrine of creation as seen in Chapter 3, magic is simultaneously impossible and nonsensical. Here it bears repeating from Chapter 2 that God cannot be manipulated. If He could be manipulated, He would no longer be God – at least not in the Anselmian sense. The gods of mythology were not infinite thus they could be manipulated, which raises the question of who is ultimately stronger: the manipulated or the manipulator? Who is stronger Baʿal or the priest with a goat liver?

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[22] David Bentley Hart, "No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility," *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (2002): 195.

The Lord also cannot be manipulated because as the ground of being – that He Himself transcends – He is the first and final cause of all things, the "Alpha and Omega" in whom "all things hold together."[23] Here is where the impossibility is also nonsensical. Per an understanding of causation deriving from the participatory ontology described in Chapter 3, the understanding of causation that magic presumes does not make any sense in relation to Divine action because it assumes that Divine action in the world is something external and intrusive. If God's action is external and intrusive, it becomes one cause amongst many. Moreover, it can be identified distinctly from all other causes, and once isolated, the conditions under which it can be controlled can be found. However, once God is understood to be the source of all existence then it becomes impossible to suss out where exactly God enters the picture.

Augustine describes this difficulty in separating the action of God from the everyday working of our world in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*. He is commenting on Jesus' miracle at Cana and is addressing the supposed marvelous nature of Jesus turning water into wine. It seems that his audience held a similar view of miracles as the modern magicians. To which Augustine replies:

> The miracle indeed of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby He made the water into wine, is not marvelous to those who know that it was God's doing. For He who made wine on that day at the marriage feast, in those six water-pots, which He commanded to be filled with water, the self-same does this every year in vines. For even as that which the servants put into the water-pots was turned into wine by the doing of the Lord, so in like manner also is what the clouds pour forth changed into wine by the doing of the same Lord. But we do not wonder at the latter, because it happens every year: it has lost its marvelousness by its constant recurrence … A dead man has risen again; men marvel: so many are born daily, and none marvels. If we reflect more considerately, it is a matter of greater wonder for one to be who was not before, than for one who was to come to life again. Yet the same God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does by His word all these things; and it is He who created that governs also. The former miracles He did

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[23] Rev. 22:13; Col. 1:17
Except evil which is a no-thing, and yet, it is nothing that is being brought into order as briefly noted above in the discussion of *On Order*.

If we tie divine action to particular instances of God working in the world, then we will find water suddenly becoming wine miraculous, but if God is understood to be always working, then everything is miraculous. We are also unable to pinpoint when it is exactly that God acts. Is it when the aging process is done? When the yeast is finished fermenting? The grapes pressed? What about the work of the vinedresser? What about the vine itself? So on and so forth back to the foundation of the world. Consequently, if we were as attentive as we ought to be, even the so-called miraculous would be mundane as it was for one pious doctor when a woman's cancer was cured.[25]

As suggested in Chapter 3, the ontology of love is the properly Christian ontology that is at odds with the *chaoskampf* ontology. Here, I want to suggest that not only is the ontology of love the properly Christian ontology but that it is the only ontology that can be consistently claimed to truly be good news. To understand how the *evangelion* needs the ontology of love, there are two interrelated eschatological consequences of holding to the *chaoskampf* ontology that are worth considering. First, if chaos is necessary for creation, then evil is no longer a parasite but an independent reality. Moreover, that means that God is not sufficient within Himself to bring about the good. He is lacking something and this something is filled up through His engagement with evil, and the good cannot stand on its own because it needs evil to exist. In turn, the necessity of evil means any eternal happiness is necessarily predicated on the anguish of others because God must become the good. Every war, every genocide, every

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[24] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 8.1, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701008.htm, accessed March 23, 2020.
[25] Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.15

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abortion, every evil great and small is necessary for God to become the creator that He is, thus making Him complicit in all the evil of history. Put differently, on this account Hell is no longer a tragedy of our own inward curving: Heaven needs Hell, the Saints need to smell the aroma of the damned's burning fat.

Two and consequently, a god who can change is ultimately not a god we can trust. We may claim that the god who is in the process of becoming is in the process of becoming a good god who will in the end work everything together for the good of those who love Him. However, if God can change there is no reason to not suppose that He may change for the worse. We could very well get to the final judgment and find a god who wants to personally torture everyone – sinner and saint – for all eternity. In sum, the chaoskampf ontology means that God needs evil to be who He is, that evil has its own existence, that the good needs evil, and God may become a god who hates us.

Such an ontology is frightening because we can never know if everything is truly working together for good. In the face of this fear we must do something, so we turn to our rites to try to "secure a blessed destiny" as Kee put it above. This is how magic, ontology, and fear are interrelated. An understanding of the world and God that leaves our final destiny to be determined leads to fear and spurs us to engage in inappropriate sacrifices as the Israelites did time and again, beginning with the Golden Calf that they worshipped when they thought Moses, and by extension God, had abandoned them. Yet, that is not how things are per an ontology of love.

Here it would be worthwhile to contemplate the three magi in the Gospel of Matthew. Gregory of Nazianzus claims that when the magi worshiped the Christ Child astrology came to

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end. The main practice of the caste from which we derive our word "magic" ended.

Commenting on this claim of Gregory's, Benedict XVI writes that the visit of the magi

overturned the understanding common at that time of the world being governed by hostile or

indifferent forces, "which in a different way has become fashionable once again today," except

now we speak of laws of nature and not hostile spirits. Instead, the universe and humankind

are ruled by, "A personal God [who] governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of

matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. And if we know

this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer

has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free."[26] We are set

free because, "within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal

will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love."[27] It is Christ, then, who "from

our fears … release[s] us," and who the Son makes free "will be free indeed," and it is precisely

because He is the Son that He is able to set us free.[28]

For if God is wholly and self-sufficiently perfect within the *perichoresis* of Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit, then He does not need to create and is thus not determined by the world at all.

Instead, the creation of the world is like "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is

from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow

due to change."[29] Since there is no shadow of turning within Love Himself who is the creator of

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[26] Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §5, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html#_ftnref2, accessed April 1, 2020.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Charles Wesley, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," https://hymnary.org/text/come_thou_long_expected_jesus_born_to, accessed April 1, 2020.
Jn. 8:36
[29] Jam. 1:17

all things, He can truly proclaim His creation as good. In fact, He could proclaim it as doubly good because the creation of the world is the second gift He gave us. The first was the babe in the manger, the Lamb slain "before the foundation of the world" "who takes away the sin of the world!"[30] Before we could even reject the gift, a perfect propitiation for our sins was made so that the gift could be given anew.

This love that is always already given, this is the love that the many chaotic waters cannot quench. This is the love that the chorus in the Song of Songs tells us, "Is as strong as death … fierce as the grave."[31] Indeed, we have seen that love is in fact stronger than the grave when Our Love was swallowed up by the grave. Love, the Apostle tells us, never ends.[32] The finite cannot contain the infinite. When death, which is the most finite thing, tried to contain infinite love death negated itself. This love that not even death could contest is indeed perfect, and "Perfect love," John the Evangelist tells us, "casts out fear."[33]

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[30] Rev. 13:8; Jn. 1:29
[31] SS. 8:6
[32] 1 Cor. 13:8
[33] 1 Jn. 4:18

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