Technological Re-Enchantment: Transhumanism, Techno-Religion, and Post-Secular Transcendence

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Abstract:

This article provides a framework for understanding the dynamics between the disenchanting effects of a uniquely modern existential meaning crisis and a countervailing re-enchantment facilitated by the techno-cultural movement of transhumanism. This movement constructs a post-secular techno-theology grounded in a transhumanist ontology that corresponds to a shift away from anthropocentric meaning systems. To shed light on this dynamic, I take a phenomenological approach to the human-technology relationship, highlighting the role of technology in ontology formation and religious imagination. I refer to examples of transhumanist religious movements to illustrate a new post-humanist ontological grounding of meaning corresponding to a contemporary meaning-crisis that scholars are calling 'neuroexistentialism.' I then use the language of Charles Taylor and his work on secularization to frame these ontological developments. Ultimately, this article argues that

transhumanist religious expression represents a zeitgeist of post-secular re-enchantment.

Introduction

Scientists and philosophers alike are beginning to recognize a uniquely modern meaning-crisis driven by the contemporary techno-scientific milieu. The term "neuroexistentialism" has been coined to describe a new wave of existentialism characterized by the disenchanting effects of science and technology that pose a fatal challenge to fundamental conceptions of humanist-based groundings of meaning, forcing a reassessment of what it means to be human and producing a correlated meaning-vacuum as these fundamental conceptions of ontological grounding begin to shift. This article explores a countervailing meaning-producing phenomenon of technological re-enchantment emerging from transhumanism, a growing cultural movement that seeks to transcend humanity through the radical use of technology. Despite the disenchanting effects of modern science and secularization, this techno-cultural movement of transhumanism[1] has given rise to new techno-religions, stimulating religious imagination based on a new techno-theology grounded in a shifted locus of meaning beyond the human subject.

To support this understanding, I explore the case of emerging techno-theology arising from the techno-cultural movement of transhumanism. Transhumanism, with its

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[1] Transhumanism is the idea that the concept of the human is open-ended and should be transcended through the use of radical technological interventions. Transhumanism shifts the locus of ultimate value from the human itself to a broader focus on consciousness, data, or information patterns, thereby seeing the human being as merely a limited manifestation of consciousness that should be technologically upgraded.

accelerationist ethos,[2] is posing a challenge to a traditionally humanist model of meaning-making, facilitating new transhumanist forms of religious expression.[3] Some of these forms of religious expression include the Church of Perpetual Life, the Turing Church, Terasem, the Christian Transhumanist Association, and the Mormon Transhumanist Association.

  With the phenomenology of perception as my point of departure, I describe the function of technology as a mediator to constructing models of reality, thereby providing a point of connection between meaning-making structures and technology. Ultimately, I argue that this ontological shift from human-centric meaning structures to the transhuman ontology has developed into a form of techno-theology, facilitating new modes of religious expression and post-humanistic meaning-making. To begin talking about how technology is affecting the underlying ontological meaning-making paradigms of techno-culture, and thereby facilitating new forms of religious expression, I will briefly lay out a phenomenological perspective on the human-technology relationship.

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[2] I use the term "accelerationist" to signify a belief in the historically inevitable process by which technology advances at a rapid, accelerating, and predictable pace. Such accelerationism and corresponding beliefs drive much of the enthusiasm for transhumanism and give strength to certain predictions of radical technological progress.

[3] Historian Yuval Noah Harari, although never using the term "transhumanism," does outline a dichotomy of dataist vs. humanist ideologies in his book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow.* I argue that this dataist mindset can be clearly observed in the growing transhumanist movement. See: Harari, Y. N. (2017) *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York: HarperCollins, p. 371.

Phenomenology of Technological Mediation

According to Heidegger, entities like ourselves experience the world first and foremost as a world of meanings, rather than objects. This view challenges the objective Cartesian concept of an observer apprehending an array of objects in a context-independent world *present-at-hand,* instead positing a phenomenologically-oriented ontology of Beings interacting with their environment in a *ready-at-hand*, context-dependent situation, always already equipped with value-predicates. In Heideggerian terms, *Dasein* is understood to be, "[…] in primary epistemic contact not with context-independent *present-at-hand* primitives […] to which context-dependent meaning would need to be added via value-predicates, but rather with equipment, the kind of entity whose mode of Being is *readiness-to-hand* and which therefore comes already laden with context-dependent significance. (italics mine)"[1] Heidegger outlines this distinction in the following way:

> What we 'first' hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling… It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise.' The fact that motor-cycles and wagons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell proximally alongside 'sensations'; nor would it first have to give shape to the swirl of sensations to provide a springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a 'world.' Dasein, as essentially understanding, is proximally alongside what is understood.[2]

Technological Re-Enchantment

The world presents itself to us as *ready-to-hand*, in terms of potential uses, not initially as objects. We see the meaning of things in terms of their uses, and then infer intentional objects from this initial perception of significance. This structure of perception is an essential element in the framework of our mode of existing in the world and produces a world with a particular set of technologically mediated questions, goals, motivations, and values. For example, a person in Latin Christendom is going to have a fundamentally different set of questions and challenges in life than the modern Western person, because their world is constructed of fundamentally different networks of goals and values, mediated by the technological conditions of their reality.[4] The technology of your world changes your world, and by extension changes your concerns to include the ultimate locus of meaning if the technological conditions are sufficiently transformative to challenge the underlying meaning-making structures.

Therefore, the world is mediated, interpreted, and ultimately constructed through technology. This technological lens frames our perceptions, attitudes, and theories of our situation, structuring reality in a particular way. Technology mediates our world insofar as it immersively sets the scope of perceptual significance in which we orient our moment-to-moment actions.[5] The set of problems that make up our perception of the world is technological.

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[4] The example of Latin Christendom is also famously used as an arbitrary point of historical contrast by the philosopher Charles Taylor when considering changes to secularity in the West. I am adopting this same point of contrast. See: Taylor, C. (2007) *A Secular Age* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 13.

[5] In his book *Homo Deus*, Harari makes an argument concerning the power of technology to set the bounds of our understanding the challenges and opportunities available in a

Technology and the Problem of Meaning

Apart from the material impact of technology, we cannot separate the technological from our understanding of the world, since the world always already presents itself from within an ontology of technological framing. In this way, the problems and questions a Western individual self might have in, for example, Medieval Europe, were different from those of today because of the different technological realities bounding the limits of how reality is understood. Technology gives rise to the kinds of problems and potentiality with which the society is presently confronted in any given historical moment. The other elements of the society, such as its particular political structure, normative values, economic system, etc., are built upon the foundation of these technologically mediated concerns.

This role of technology implies a link between technology and meaning. The relationship between technology and meaning can be seen in the shifted grounding of meaning from the divine to the human that precipitated liberal humanism and its various corresponding political and economic systems of organization. Commenting on the nature of this transition, historian Yuval Noah Harari writes, "the central religious revolution of modernity was not losing faith in God; rather, it was gaining faith in humanity."[3] For example we can see this transition in the work of John Locke, manifested in the *Declaration of Independence* of the United States, which is decidedly humanist in its foundational beliefs

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given society, although without emphasizing a phenomenological approach. Likewise, much work has been done by Don Ihde in the area of post-phenomenology, producing a more nuanced and granular examination of the human-technology relationship. See: Ihde, D. (1990) *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Indianapolis, IA: Indiana University Press.

in the human as a free, individual self, worthy of inalienable rights. Although these rights originate from a divine creator who established natural law, the Deism fashionable at that time required only a small shift to eventually bracket off the divine agent, leaving only the superordinate 'natural law' itself.

With this newfound confidence and faith in humanity, the West committed to a new paradigm of locating ultimate meaning in humanist values. This was not a painless transition, as Nietzsche foretold with his proclamation of the 'death of God.' The experiments in different varieties of humanism, such as the communist and Nazi varieties, each held the same fundamentally secular belief in the primacy of the human as a source of meaning, although these systems disagreed drastically as to the scope and implications of such a commitment.

However, the 19th century was one of religious diversity and fervor, at a time when certain secular and religious paradigms of meaning were competing to fill a meaning-vacuum formed by a rapidly changing world. The technological conditions of reality were changing, and there were several options from which to choose when deciding how best to adapt. Considering this process, Harari asks,

> Why did Marx and Lenin succeed where Hong and Mahdi failed? Not because socialist humanism was philosophically more sophisticated than Islam and Christian theology, but rather because Marx and Lenin devoted more attention to understanding the technological and economic realities of their time […][4]

These reactions to the meaning vacuum fit with what philosopher Charles Taylor terms "the malaise of modernity" whereby our modern "spiritually unstable" milieu is characterized by a need for meaning.[5]

This makes sense in a context where technology is understood as playing a major role in the creation of meaning systems. Harari writes, "[…] technology often defines the scope and limits of our religious visions. […] New technologies kill old gods and give birth to new gods."[6] In this way, Marx's apt understanding of and adapting to the new technological realities of his time are what drove the powerful rise of Marxism. Old paradigms of meaning must continuously adapt to avoid becoming obsolete. As Marx wrote, "[…] mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."[7] In this way, we can start to see a path by which technology can give rise to yet another shift in meaning-making, facilitating new forms of religious expression such as the new religions emerging from the transhumanist movement.

Science, Technology, and Religion

This is not to say that traditional 'world religions' are not adaptable. Indeed, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) is now compelling mainstream religious organizations to confront accelerating technological change. One example is the Southern Baptist Convention who recently issued an official declaration of principles concerning AI to address the growing relevance and social impact of accelerating technology.[8] However, there are other voices in this discussion about the different possible ways contemporary religion can adapt to a technologically changing world.

For example, Miroslav Volf writes about contemporary religion and globalization, including the corresponding issue of accelerating technological advance.[9] In his book *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, Volf points out that:

Unless we seriously misunderstand both globalization and world religions, the achievements of well-run globalization and the offering of world religions aren't in competition with one another. More precisely: market-driven globalization in alliance with science and technology and globalization shaped by world religions aren't exclusive alternatives and need not clash; religions have their own contribution to make without diminishing the importance of science and technology.[10]

In response to thinkers such as Volf, who object to the way in which technology and religion are pitted against each other in a competition for hearts and minds, a distinction must be made as to *why* technological adaptation is occurring. The assumption that science is functioning merely as descriptive or that technology's function is merely providing material goods ignores the deeper ontological *essence* of technology and its potential effect on meaning making. Volf rightly points out that, "… to put the contest between religion on the one side and science and technology on the other in these terms presumes that religions, like science and technology, primarily aim at explaining and manipulating the world."[11]

This is a compelling position since it rejects the notion that religion is merely oriented at explaining the world, but the technology/religion dialogue does not necessarily have to assume such a position. My point is not to reduce the function or role of religion to the level of scientific explanation, but to show how science and technology can shape meaning-making paradigms, going beyond the mere explanatory function typically granted them. Volf's point is correct, but only if we disregard science and technology's power to affect meaning-making paradigms and to facilitate the transcendent. Volf writes:

From the perspective of world religions, their central challenge isn't to gain a competitive advantage over

science and technology or at least maintain their share of the same "market." World religions don't stand or fall on their ability to deliver more and better worldly gods to more people than do science and technology in the context of globalization—goods like health and longevity, the necessities and conveniences of life, or explanations of how the world and things in it function. World religions stand or fall on their ability to connect to the transcendent realm and thereby make it possible for them to truly flourish, to find genuine fulfillment in both their successes and failures, and to lead lives worthy of human beings...[12]

This objection is valid, but only by assuming a narrow conception of the role of science and technology in affecting meaning-making. Nevertheless, Volf's point of view is necessary to present a valid counter-perspective that helps to draw the limits of such claims on science and technology's impact on religion.

For now, the liberal humanist paradigm of meaning is holding strong in modern Western society, but the prevalence of this paradigm does not necessarily correlate to the continued stability or longevity of the paradigm. History is rife with examples of paradigm shifts emanating from relatively small groups that represented indicators of how religion was changing. New transhumanist religions may be providing such an indication since they are founded on a shift toward fundamentally different paradigms of meaning.

Shifting Paradigms: From Humanism to Transhumanism

Prior to the ontological changes described in this article, the label given to the modern grounding of meaning-making has been 'liberalism,' or the more general term 'humanism.'[6] This signifies a modern Western sense of

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[6] Both Harari and Taylor point to what I believe is the same

placing the individual human self at the center of our system of values. Charles Taylor adds to this the modern emphasis on following our individual hearts and desires. Taylor notes how the modern Western ethic of authenticity emerging after the Second World War placed special emphasis on a kind of humanism that gave precedent to the desires and feelings of the individual. Mantras such as 'follow your heart' and 'do what feels right' became widely popular, and when seeking answers to deep personal questions, your friends, family, or therapist will no longer advise that you seek the counsel of your priest to interpret the appropriate action, but rather ask how you feel, what would make you happy, and understand the solution in terms of how it best expresses the desire of your *true* self.[13]

This modern ethic is built on an understanding of the human as an innately free and individual self, possessing both free will and innate value. The liberal intersubjective ideology, complete with its commitments to universal human rights and the resulting legal and political systems on which are predicated these ontological presuppositions are themselves upheld by prior essential presuppositions about reality.[7] For

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modern humanist locus of meaning when they speak of "humanism" or "liberal humanism."

[7] The term 'intersubjective' has been used in many ways by philosophers and social scientists. I use the term intersubjective here in the same way as Harari to refer to a level of reality distinct from subjective and objective realities whereby an entity or concept emerges as a function of many individuals holding a common belief. Examples of intersubjective entities or concepts include corporations, imagined national communities, the value of paper money, etc. whereby the entity does not exist objectively, but rather exists as an intersubjective supposition. See: Harari, *Homo Deus*, p.146.

example, the structural integrity of this edifice requires the concepts of free will and a model of the self as *individual*. Only then are we able to derive an innate value of the individual and locate our sources of meaning in a conception of human agency based on the presupposition of free will.[14]

Transhumanist Technology and Neuroexistentialism

The current grounding of humanist individualism and corresponding religious ultimate concerns are being challenged by certain scientific discoveries and technological advances. I label this set of scientific discoveries and technological advances as "transhumanist technology."[8]

Since our liberal humanist worldview is based on a conception of the self with axiomatic presuppositions such as free will and individualism, we must look to transhumanist technologies that pose a potential threat to these particular elements of the contemporary humanist ethic. We can see that, if an empirically valid observation of the world contradicts some element of our presuppositions, that this will call into question the validity of that presupposition, thereby posing a fatal challenge to the conclusions which the presuppositions support. We can see that, given the implicit acceptance of the concept of free will, for example, that we do not simply *believe* in free will, but also hold some sort of basis on which to believe it at some level—the belief had to be perceived as being real, grounded in our understanding of reality, not arbitrary. It then follows that, insofar as our understanding of material reality changes, so too could our beliefs since our reliance on the concept of free will represents an elementary presupposition of the humanist liberal order. Additionally,

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[8] "Transhumanist technologies" is a term I use to refer to advanced technologies with transhumanist implications, i.e., that hold the potential to shift the mainstream cultural attitude towards that of transhumanism.

since such a belief is not arbitrary and must be seen as true, in a sense as corresponding to our reality, any challenge to the empirical truth-value of this claim could undermine its ultimate validity and ontological status, resulting in the above-described disruption to the paradigm.

Harari states that, "For liberalism to make sense, I must have one—and only one—true self, for if I had more than one authentic voice, how would I know which voice to heed in the polling station, in the supermarket and the marriage market? […] If I look really deep within myself, the seeming unity that I take for granted dissolves into a cacophony of conflicting voices, none of which is 'my true self.' Humans aren't individuals. They are 'dividuals.'"[15] This reinforces the notion that our modern paradigm of liberal humanist meaning is grounded in large part on the idea of the individual self. Transhumanist technology is posing a challenge to this element of humanist grounding.

Our modern paradigm of liberal humanist meaning is not merely grounded in a conception of the individual self, but also depends on that self as possessing a free will.[16] In 2015, I asked the philosopher and linguist Noam Chomsky a question concerning the nature of the mind and its computability. Essentially, my question asked whether he believed the mind to be computable, in principle. Chomsky answered by stating:

> The mind is organized matter. It's organized in a particular way, which we don't understand, but we don't understand much about bee communication. We don't know of any physical reason to believe that the particular components of that organized matter are critical for its operation. It appears to be something about the way it's organized; that's as far as we know.

> So therefore, it could be emulated, presumably, in some other substances.[9]

However, he went on to say, "[…] the major question—what is the puppeteer doing—that is one that we don't even know how to address." [9]

The 'puppeteer' to whom Chomsky refers is the mysterious pre-conscious driver of our thoughts and actions, uncovered by recent discoveries in neuroscience.[17,18] His analogy to a puppeteer is apt; what he is alluding to is the fact that recent neuroscience has confirmed that intentional human action in the body is initiated in the brain prior to conscious awareness of the action. This means that when we make decisions we are actually acting on mobilizing forces prior to our consciousness of having made our decision to act, implying some kind of disconnect between the thing that we suppose is making our decisions—namely, our individual, free, willful 'self'—and the thing actually making the decision, which seems to be much more diffuse and complex. This leads to a new understanding of how free-will functions, presenting an incompatible element of consciousness that our present humanist model of self cannot incorporate. These revelations serve as key drivers of this new wave of shifting meaning structures.

The 'puppeteer' study to which Chomsky referred concluded that, "…the outcome of a decision can be encoded in brain activity of prefrontal and parietal cortex up to 10 s before it enters awareness. This delay presumably reflects the

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[9] This question was posed to Prof. Chomsky through a live online correspondence facilitated by Twitter and broadcast live on the Internet as part of a public speaking engagement. My question was posed to Chomsky by the moderator. See: Chomsky, N. (2015) *Chomsky and Krauss: An Origins Project Dialogue (official) - (Part 2/2)* [Video File]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbxp8ViBTu8

operation of a network of high-level control areas that begin to prepare an upcoming decision long before it enters awareness."[19] Essentially, this new understanding shows that our actions are based on operations in the brain, the neuronal correlates to which we are able to empirically observe. The new reality emerging from this science tells us that free will is more complicated than our conception of an individual human agent making their own decisions. *You*, in an essential sense, are not making choices despite the intuitive phenomenology of perception and identity.

There are many discrete examples of transhumanist technology presenting similar challenges to traditional understandings of the self and a corresponding grounding of meaning, from brain-machine interfaces to technologically enabled neuroscientific insights into the nature of perception and behavior. These innovations collectively are now giving rise to what some scholars are now calling "neuroexistentialism." This can be understood in the following context:

> There are three kinds of existentialism that respond to three different kinds of grounding projects— grounding in God's nature, in a shared vision of collective good, or in science. The first-wave existentialism of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche expressed anxiety about the idea that meaning and morals are made secure because of God's omniscience and good will. The second-wave existentialism of Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir was a post-Holocaust response to the idea that some uplifting secular vision of the common good might serve as a foundation. Today, there is a third-wave existentialism, neuroexistentialism, which expresses the anxiety that, even as science yields the truth about human nature, it also disenchants.[20]

My argument is that transhumanist technologies are now providing an adaptive means of re-enchantment as a response to the challenge of third-wave neuroexistentialism by dissolving the "boundary of the mind" that Taylor describes as the defining feature of what he calls the "buffered," disenchanted self.[21]

Techno-theology: Dissolving the Porous/Buffered Boundary

The question then becomes: what does the human-technology relationship reveal in a world of rapidly accelerating transhumanist technologies? To understand what it means to be religious in an age of advanced technology, I frame the concepts of religion and the secular through the lens of Charles Taylor and his model of the 'porous' and buffered' selves since these shifts in meaning making seem to tightly correspond to the shifts in meaning making he describes as having occurred in the prior God-centric to human-centric shift. The human-centric to transhuman shift can be seen as the next step in Taylor's model.

Taylor's phenomenological approach starts with a presupposition that humans do not possess an innate, universal, unchanging nature, and that from epoch to epoch, the nature of how humans relate to the world can change. In comparing the two epochs of the years 1500 and 2000, Taylor sees two distinct versions of a conception of self and its relation to the world. In the older version of the past, he describes a way-of-being he calls the "porous self"—this term refers to the porous nature of the boundary between the self and the world. This is a conception in which the self, living in a pre-scientific world, is available to enchantment in a world full of mysterious spiritual forces.

He contrasts this 'porous self' with the modern way of being, called the "buffered self," which is a result of our disenchantment and newfound confidence in our ability to

find order in the world.[22] The buffered self is "buffered" or "shielded," in the sense that, in the modern "social imaginary,"[10] the self is no longer available to the magic of the enchanted world—we are no longer porous; we live in our own internal psychological and scientifically grounded reality.

Here, Taylor links the concepts of porousness and enchantment. Taylor summarizes the key concepts of the porous and buffered selves in the following way:

> Almost everyone can agree that one of the big differences between us and our ancestors of five hundred years ago is that they lived in an "enchanted" world, and we do not; at the very least, we live in a much less "enchanted" world. We might think of this as our having "lost" a number of beliefs and the practices which they made possible. But more, the enchanted world was one in which these forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical. One of the big differences between us and them is that we live with a much firmer sense of the boundary between self and other. We are "buffered" selves. We have changed.[23]

Taylor's conception of the buffered self serves as a sophisticated model of secularization and serves as a way of understanding the implications of the emerging techno-theology represented by transhumanist religions. In a world

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[10] Taylor's concept of social imaginary can be defined as: "Different from an intellectual system or framework, "broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode," surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it carried images, stories, legends, etc." See: Smith, J. K. A. (2014) *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. See also: Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 171-172.

saturated by transhumanist technology, a new-wave neuroexistential meaning crisis, and corresponding countervailing materialist techno-theologies, it is meaningless to call the self "buffered." One must ask, from what is it buffered?

There is no longer this kind of subject/object dualism. There is no opposing realm from which the self is buffered. No longer is the subject buffered from the enchanted world because in the transhumanist world all is contained, in principle, within the same material space-time system, which itself is available to materially realized yet mysterious and functionally miraculous forces.[11]

In a transhumanist world full of mysterious, albeit ultimately material forces, the barrier between the realm of phenomenal experience and the magical world is flattened— the transhumanist world is completely available to the miraculous, and this is taken for granted. The entire world is contained within a common plane of reality available to the miraculous, albeit a materially-realized, functionally miraculous. This represents a cultural re-enchantment linked to technology. For transhumanist religions, a techno-theology of re-enchantment moves the locus of meaning through a transmutation of the human to the transhuman.

In his book, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor lays out a critique of Weberean secularization theory by rejecting the traditionally conceived notion of secularization as an

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[11] My use of "miraculous" here is in a functional sense—I am claiming a miracle in this sense need not be supernatural, by definition, but be mysterious to the person or group experiencing the miracle. A miracle with a supernatural cause and a miracle with a perceived or expected material cause are functionally and phenomenologically equivalent as long as the element of mystery exists—they are experienced in the same way and serve the same function.

axiomatic result of a decline in religion—something Taylor describes as a mere 'subtraction story.' Instead, Taylor sees our disenchanted secular world as a result of a complex process of buffering ourselves to the enchanted world, to which our Western ancestors of 500 years ago were porously open. The porous openness of the past resulted in theirs being an enchanted world. However, given the challenge of modern technological conditions, I claim that our uniquely advanced transhumanist technology is bringing back this state of enchantment by eliminating the boundary between the magical and the "real world" in which we act, thereby revealing the role modern technology plays in forming new paradigms of meaning and religious expression.

The old world in which people of Latin Christendom acted was enchanted precisely because it was co-located with the world of the mysterious and miraculous—there was no boundary. The same now holds for transhumanists and their worldview as transhumanist techno-theology dissolves the secular boundary between the magical realm and the material world; they are once again coterminous in a re-enchanted world of unlimited technological potentiality. Transhumanist technology serves to transfer the locus of meaning from the human to quantifiable data, thus combining the world of perceived technological wonder with the phenomenologically experienced self. This self is no longer indivisible, but malleable and deconstructed. The world is, once again, porous.

Transhumanist Hyper-connectivity: Collapsing Boundaries

The transhumanist future expects a world of hyper-connectivity. Some transhumanists, such as Singularitarians[12],

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[12] Singularitarians are a subset of transhumanists who hold a belief in a coming event known as the Technological

hope to connect their minds with machines, in line with the possibilities of the deconstructed, quantified, dataist conception of self. This would, in principle, collapse the boundary between an external world and the mind—a boundary that Charles Taylor defines as a necessary condition for the modern buffered self. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek agrees that the removal of this buffer would amount to a categorical shift in the human condition, noting, "[…] are we aware that, if this becomes a reality—this direct link between our brain and digital space […] then in a way we will no longer be human because to be human means to have this minimal sense of separation between me in my mind and reality out there. Who knows what happens when this distance falls."[24] This minimal separation represents the metaphorical "buffer" of Taylor's "buffered self"—the metaphysical vanguard defending against our return to the enchanted world. In a transhumanist ontology, Being will not be thought of in terms of the human but rather the transhuman of nebulous identity and patterns of data.

In such a world, who or where is the puppeteer? This question highlights my connection to Taylor since his concept of the buffered self relies on the presence of a boundary separating our mental world and the external world. I am claiming that the transhumanist view implies the elimination

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Singularity. This event has an eschatological dimension as it represents a transformative world-changing moment when technology accelerates at an explosive exponential rate, creating near-infinite levels of superintelligence and creating new possibilities that cannot currently be conceived of using current human minds. The Technological Singularity is therefore tantamount to an end-times event found in millenarian religious beliefs and includes a functionally-miraculous transition to a state of permanent well-being through mysterious, unknowable technological processes.

of this distinction—it implies a world where we are directly linked to the deconstructed plane of data on which the miraculous technologies mysteriously function.

Similarly, in Taylor's concept of the enchanted world of the porous self, people were likewise directly available to the mysterious and magical. Taylor writes,

> …in the enchanted world, the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn. We see this again in relics. The cures effected by them, or the curse laid on people who stole them or otherwise mishandled them. Were seen both as emanating from them, as loci of power, and also as coming from the good will, or anger, of the saint they belonged to. Indeed, we can say that in this world, there is a whole gamut of forces, ranging from (to take the evil side for a moment) super-agents like Satan himself, forever plotting to encompass our domination, down to minor demons, like the spirits of the wood, which are almost indistinguishable from the loci they inhabit, and ending in magic potions which bring sickness or death. This illustrates that […] in the enchanted world, in contrast to our universe of buffered selves and "minds," shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries which seem to us essential.[25]

Functionally, the enchanted world was one in which *objects* were tacitly understood to be imbued with potential mysterious power. What, essentially, is the difference between this and magical technology? As Singularity University[13] co-founder David Rose wrote, "Humans today are no less prone

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[13] Singularity University is a transhumanist educational institute co-founded by transhumanist Singularitarian thinker (and current Director of Engineering at Google, Inc.) Ray Kurzweil.

to believe in potions and elixirs, magic stones fountains, and youth-giving spirits than the past."[26] As was the case in the enchanted world, objects have power. This reflects Taylor's conception of the porous, which he understood as representing the enchanted world of Medieval Europe. This world is returning by transhumanist technology removing the Taylorian buffer, opening space for re-enchantment through techno-theology.

It is this notion of boundary that defines the modern buffered self. Taylor notes that, "The materialist fantasy, that we could for all we know be brains in a vat, being manipulated by some mad scientist, depends for its sense on this view that the material sufficient condition for thoughts of all kinds is within the cranium." In other words, our buffered self depends on a conception of self predicated on a mind-centric world, as opposed to the enchanted world. Taylor writes:

> the crucial difference between the mind-centered view and the enchanted world emerges when we look at meanings in this sense[14] that things only have the meaning they do in that they awaken a certain response in us, and this has to do with our nature as creatures who are thus capable of such responses, which means

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[14] Taylor's sense of "meanings" here is in the context of a discussion of thoughts. Taylor writes: "What I am gesturing at with the expression "thoughts, etc."? I mean, of course, the perceptions we have, as well as the beliefs of propositions which we hold or entertain about the world and ourselves. But I also mean our responses, the significance, importance, meaning, we find in things. I want to use for these the generic term 'meaning,' even though there is in principle a danger of confusion with linguistic meaning. Here I am using it in the sense in which we talk about "the meaning of life," or of a relationship as having great "meaning" for us." See Taylor, *Secular Age*, p. 31.

creatures with feelings, with desires, aversions, i.e., beings endowed with minds, in the broadest sense.[27] Transhumanism represents a move away from the humanist ethic of the buffered, anthropocentric identity that gave rise to the "malaises of modernity" of which Taylor writes. Humans are now moving back to a pre-buffered state of enchantment by moving past the human, past the anthropocentric, having transitioned from a pre-humanistic structure, through a humanistic one, to the functionally enchanted post-humanistic structure of meaning. When you remove the world-mind substance boundary, you strip away the security of being a buffered self and are once again available to an enchanted reality. As Taylor explains, "Living in a disenchanted world, the buffered self is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind, indeed negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary."[28] What has in modernity provided such a buffer is now becoming experienced as obsolete, returning to a porous, enchanted default mode.

Conclusion

The mediating function of technology, in which our world is constructed through a technological lens, characterizes the human-technology relationship. In a world of rapidly accelerating and increasingly immersive technologies, our meaning-making paradigms have the potential to deconstruct into a more transhumanist orientation. We see this early shift in the rise of transhumanist religions and third-wave neuroexistentialism. Some of these transhumanist religions include the Church of Perpetual Life, the Turing Church, the Terasem Faith, the Christian Transhumanist Association, and the Mormon Transhumanist Association, among others. Likewise, Singularitarianism poses a novel example of millennialism in the new light of techno-theology.

Faced with accelerating transhumanist technology, the "buffer" of Taylor's secularization model could be removed as a slide back into a "re-enchanted" state of living in an immersive world of technologically enabled enchantment occurs. This slide back to an enchanted world begins when we start to lose what Zizek describes as our "minimal sense of separation between me in my mind and reality out there," and what Taylor describes as, "certain boundaries which are both familiar and crucial…"[29] Transhumanist religions represent an early sign of this merger.

The rise of transhumanist religions is a product of what Harari calls an intersubjective ideology of "dataism," born from technological accelerationism and novel interpretations of key scientific discoveries, framed within the rich historical legacy of techno-millennial expectations in the West.[15] The new transhumanist techno-theology is the result of a confluence of factors that include the material technological conditions able to generate key interpretations of reality that serve to challenge traditional paradigms of the self. In the midst of a wave of disenchanting neuroexistentialism, transhumanist techno-theology represents the deeply human quest for meaning adapted to the modern technological age. By relocating the modern ontological grounding, transhumanism is contributing to a post-secular zeitgeist of technologically mediated re-enchantment.

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