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Technology in the Age of Information

ABSTRACTS

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Technology and transcendence

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According to Weber (1864---1920), "the fate of our times" is characterized by "disenchantment of the world." The scientific ambition to rationally explain the world and the aspiration to control and master nature through technological calculation make believing in gods that can ward off dangers increasingly superfluous. By scientifically uncovering causal chains, the world will ultimately be completely deprived of "mysterious incalculable forces" (Weber 1946, p. 155). As a consequence, religion will lose, it is thought, its reason for existence.

The view that there is an antagonistic relation between religion and science seems to have attracted many followers throughout the years. Religion and science are seen as incompatible or non---overlapping, as expressed in, for example, the 'Draper---White' conflict thesis (1874, 1898) and Gould's *NOMA* (Non Overlapping magisteria --- 2002). Today this view is strongly defended by 'religion bashers' like Richard Dawkins and Herman Philipse. Because technology is often viewed as applied science, many people seem to believe that also technology and religion are incompatible.

The focus in this text will be not on the relation between religion and science but on religion and technology, 1) since there is a long history of debate and reflection on science and religion, but there is not much said about the relation between religion and technology (see George 2006, p. 7---12), 2) since technology has in our era a profound impact on all facets of our lives and bodies, and 3) since especially in our time technological developments (in for example biotechnology and nanotechnology) seem to have gained momentum, which makes it important to consider technology in its own right.

This paper will try to debunk the 'technology is a threat to religion' framework. First, we will show that Weber's 'disenchantment' thesis is not confirmed by empirical research. Contrary to what theorists of secularization would have us believe, empirical research indicates that religion is ubiquitous in various forms (see Berger 1999; Szerszynski 2005). These findings as such do not provide an alternative perspective on the relation between religion and science/technology but they create space for another and possibly more positive interpretation of that relation. This more positive interpretation will be prepared through a discussion with, among others, Borgmann and his device paradigm.

We will further elaborate how religion and technology are not foreign entities that stand outside one another but are rather intertwined by an analysis of the concept of 'transcendence.' We will show how transcendence is an inherent dimension not only of *religious experience* but also of technology and technological development, which indicates that the aim of this paper is not to study or compare specific religions and the way they are dealing with (new) technologies. 'Transcendence' will be phenomenologically depicted in three related directions, which can be recognized as indispensable or at least important in virtually every religious experience: 1) as the experience of being confronted with a limit that is dictated by our bodies, our minds or material circumstances; 2) as the experience of overcoming a certain limit; 3) as the experience of recognizing that overcoming certain limits is not completely our own accomplishment.

Our analysis will illustrate that technologies and technological developments do overcome limits but do not destroy the experience of transcendence. In, for example, the very desire to cross boundaries those boundaries are recognized. A discussion of Augustine's concept of desire, Sandel's notion of the 'openness to the unbidden' and the religious concept of hubris will clarify why the notion of religious transcendence that we propose does not refer to a sphere beyond or after our actual world but is rather an attempt to express very worldly border experiences in various parts of our lives, including science and technology. The experience of transcendence is precisely characterized by the experience that we are not able to look across the border. Transcendence is, therefore, always bound to immanence. Don Ihde's mediation paradigm will be used to further explain why the antonym of transcendence is not immanence but reductionism.

To evaluate more concretely to what extent technology leaves room for transcendence or even help to shape experiences of it, we will apply our framework to two particular types of technology: neurotechnologies like neurofeedback en deep brain stimulation and human reproduction technologies like IVF and prenatal genetic interventions. Recognizing the transcendent dimension of technology can, we will argue, contribute to social and ethical discussions about these and other contemporary technologies. It can also make religious narratives regarding, for example, pride, exodus (exploring unknown paths) and accepting our fate fruitful again for these discussions.

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