

Technology

and

Religion

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I. INTRODUCTION

Countries throughout the world are now engaged in the development of technology. They regard this development as their hope and that of mankind. By technology, we mean a combination of both science and technique. Without science, technique is blind and without technique, science is merely an empty term. It is with this rationale in mind that we accepted the above definition of 'technology'.

Technological advancement on the one hand allows us to anticipate the coming of a "Brave New World." However, on the other hand, it leads us into a desperate descent. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that in a time of technological advancement man still has to seek spiritual vistas through religion. It happens even in the technologically

advanced western countries where diverse religious phenomena grow alongside the development of technology. Some people may explain this by Marx's saying that "religion is the opium of the people." The fact, nevertheless, is not as simple as it appears. It has its own profound meaning and implication.

The development of technology, on the whole, has great influence on the traditional religions and has even been a serious blow to them. Since technology is a product of reasoning, it has replaced religion as the object of faith. However, technology cannot satisfy the pursuit for the meaning of life, nor can it curtail man's ultimate concerns. As an expression of our ultimate concern and a commitment to the meaning of life, religion still has its positive and irreplaceable value.

II. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND RELIGION

History has shown us that the emergence of modern technology has made a decisive impact on traditional religions, especially on Christianity. Commenting on the revolution of modern technology, H. Butterfield, in his The Origins of Modern Science 1300-1800, says:

It has made all that came after Christianity inferior, it reduces the Renaissance and the Reformation to mere interludes --- they are only some internal changes within the system of Medieval Christianity.

The technological development after the 17th century has not only changed our material livelihood, it has also revolutionized our knowledge, our morality and even our existential situation. From the core to the rim it has brought about a great change in religion.

In short, modern technology has produced various mechanical inventions and an improvement in production, communication and lifestyle. It has also transformed our view on life, the universe and our place in it. It has modified our way of thinking. As a result, science and religion were bound to confront each other in history.

The conflict was first expressed in the discord between the new astronomy and the picture of the universe as conceived by Christianity. The expostulation of the heliocentric theory by the Polish astronomer N. Copernicus was at once in conflict with the traditional Christian geocentric theory. Copernicus's hypothesis was the object of severe criticism by all religious authorities. However diverse their theologies, all schools of both Catholics and Protestants jointly attacked this

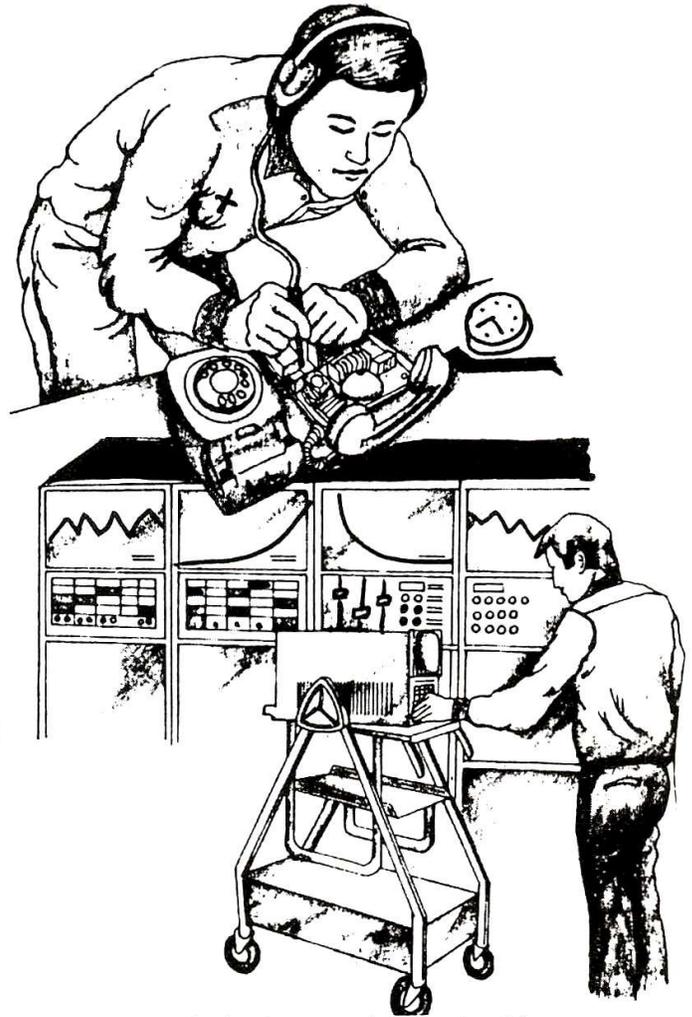
"heresy," whose threats they felt.

Later, with the help of the telescope, Galileo produced some empirical evidence substantiating the heliocentric theory. For that however, he was condemned by a religious court. This incident has often been cited, by later sceptics, to argue that religion is anti-scientific.

In fact, religious circles treated Galileo's case in the most rational way they knew. A change of outlook on both astronomy and reason is always difficult and slow. To the religious authorities and theologians of that time it was difficult to believe that information obtained through a telescope was enough to refute an astronomy long thought to be authentic by religious tradition. To them the two views in question were obviously of unequal weight.

From the standpoint of traditional religion, the verdict was by no means anti-scientific or anti-rational; it was only to guarantee a picture of the universe and a conception of reason long held by them. Nevertheless, when evidence supporting the rational elements of the hypotheses of both Copernicus and Galileo had gradually become apparent, the Christian authorities finally accepted the heliocentric theory.

From the case of Galileo we see that the interaction between religion and science was in a period of negative rejection only. At that time, the conceptual system recognised by Christianity was incompatible with that of science. Why? Because it was incompatible with theological thought and because in the area of conceptual systems religion's authority was dictatorial and carried a lot of weight. Even though faced with the challenge of scientific thought, religion was able to maintain its position of authority and had amassed enough power to reject



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the challenge of science's conceptual system. It even produced religious condemnations.

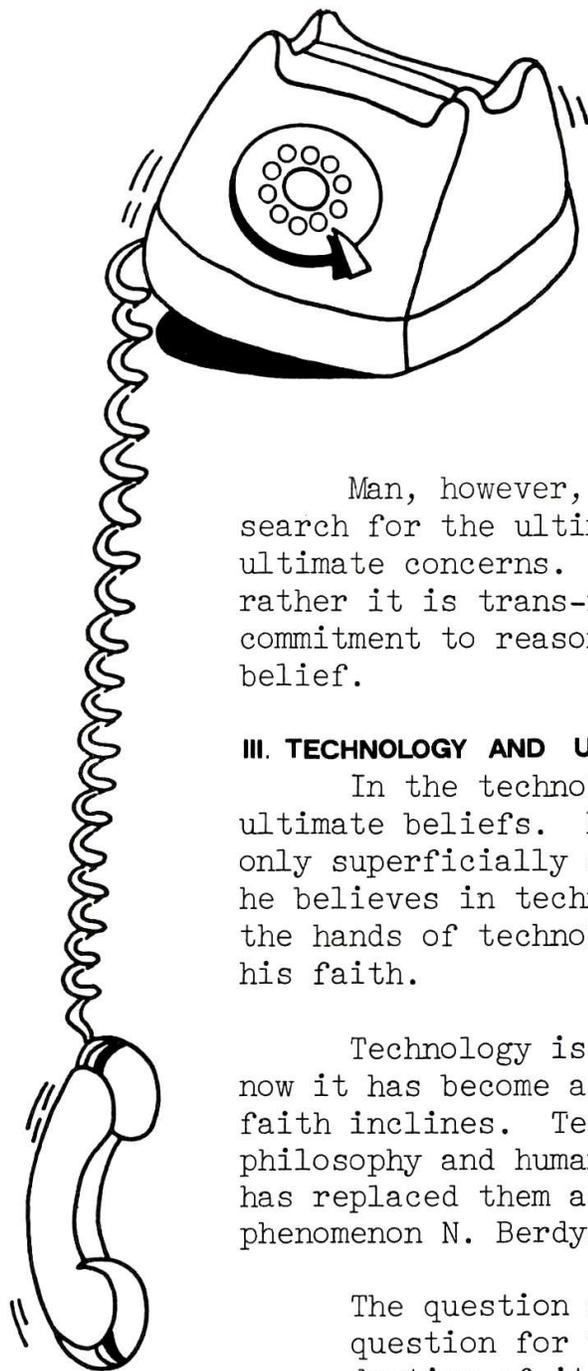
As Christianity later understood the truth of the scientific conceptual system, the heliocentric theory was accepted.

In the 18th century, the British scientist, Newton, offered a great synthesis of natural science's picture of the universe. Such a triumph in natural science was later accepted by Christianity. Likewise, the theory of evolution proposed by Darwin in the 19th century was gradually acknowledged by religious thinkers as a possible hypothesis, though the theory caused great shock waves in biblical interpretation. Furthermore, the emergence of Einstein's theory of relativity in this century was not rejected as unacceptable. On the contrary, its truth and value was affirmed at certain levels. Religious compromises in the field of thought signify the arrival of the age of criticism.

After the period of negative rejection, theology began to acknowledge the validity of science at least in part. Yet, they still endeavoured to point out the limits of science, holding that the truth of science could not replace the truth of religion. Nevertheless, the compromises inevitably led to a re-evaluation of the beliefs and theologies of the religious communities, because in the course of self-criticism the limitations of their beliefs and theologies also became apparent. Consequently, one could not but recognise the pluralistic nature of conceptual systems.

The period of criticism has extended to the present day. Today it seems that religious faith has reached a new turning point which has contrasting parts. On the one hand, religious faith has completely surrendered its place to science insofar as these systems of thought are concerned. In interpreting religion, theologians even seek help from the methods of science. For instance, they use psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other scientific approaches, to explain religion. On the other hand, while losing its position of leadership in the field of thought, religious faith has returned to its original purpose and has become again the guide, regarding mankind's ultimate concerns. In spite of the satisfaction derived from a system of scientific thought, man still feels that the meaning of life is his ultimate concern, and such a concern cannot be replaced by any technological development.

According to J. K. Galbraith, technology has created for men an "affluent society." Men no longer seek religious comfort when they are



Technology leaves questions about the meaning of life, unanswered!

materially impoverished. Instead, they turn to technology, which is more effective. In fact, technology has provided men with a more reasonable picture of the universe, a picture which allows room for further development. Technology confronts all unchallenged authorities. It has replaced the function religion had in the past in the area of conceptual systems. It even questions the possibility of an apocalyptic religion.

Man, however, is still man. He still needs to search for the ultimate meaning of life. He still has his ultimate concerns. Religious belief is not irrational; rather it is trans-rational. It represents man's final commitment to reason. Thus mankind still needs religious belief.

III. TECHNOLOGY AND ULTIMATE BELIEF

In the technological age, man still has his hidden ultimate beliefs. He expresses his religious commitment only superficially and only to gain an advantage. That is, he believes in technology, entrusts the meaning of life to the hands of technology and makes technology the object of his faith.

Technology is first a product of human reason, and now it has become a god, towards which man's non-reasoning faith inclines. Technology has expelled religion, philosophy and humanism from their respective realms and has replaced them as the new religion. Regarding this phenomenon N. Berdyaev has given a clear explanation:

The question of technology has become a question for the human race and for the destiny of its entire civilization. In a time of spiritual depression like ours, both old-time religion and the 19th century's humanistic faith have received a shock. Civilized man only believes in the power and the unlimited possibilities of technological science.

Technology is man's ultimate love. Man is willing to change his own image for her.

That technology can acquire its godlike status, I think, is the result of our expectations regarding its liberating power. Through the development of technology, we hope not only to obtain material abundance, to accomplish social freedom and equality, but also to solve all unknowns and to fulfill all human wishes. Regarding the liberating function of technology Aristotle already made some speculations two thousand years ago. In the Politics he says,

Only under one condition can a leader no longer need servants, a master no longer need slaves, that is when a tool can perform perfectly its duty, like Homer's Daedalus, or the tripod of Hephaestos. They automatically struggle with the gods, like the shuttle of an automatic weaver or a player-piano.

Aristotle places the hope of achieving a genuine equality and liberation - liberating man from any master-slave relationship - on a society of automation, a result of the development of technology. This is profoundly meaningful. Technology seems to be the only way for man to obtain liberation.

To investigate further, we must ask what does civilized man's belief in technology represent? Technology has replaced the old deities and transformed itself into a new and nameless god. We have passed from an agricultural society to a technological one. The significance of this can be described in Aristotle's terms, as a transition from physis to techné; or from organism to organization, to use Berdyaev's description. It is a transition from spontaneous growth to an artificial structure, from a natural organic life to an organised and controlled one. Running parallel with technological development is the emergence of a new existence, whose composition is constructed and organised by man through his control of technology. N. Berdyaev comments:

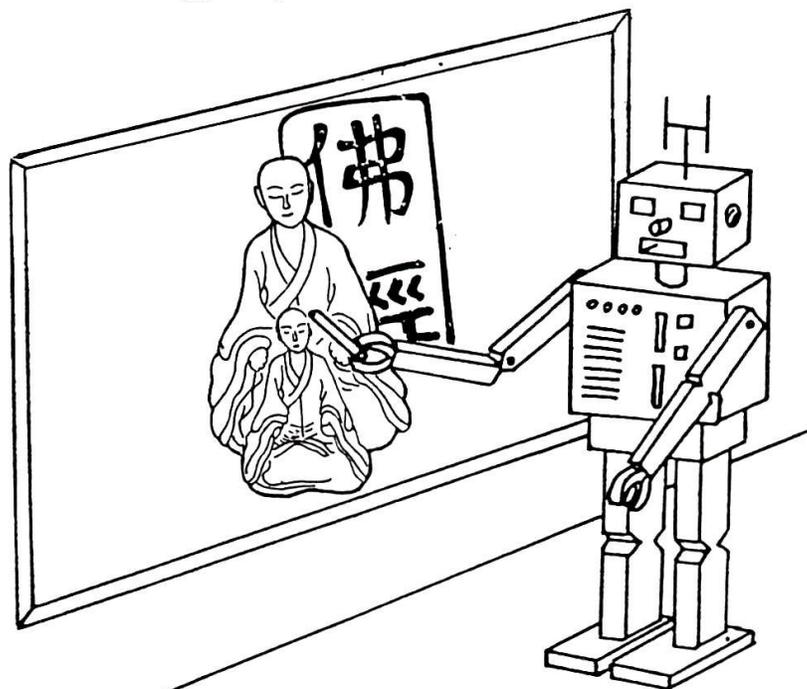
The Christian theory of "the end of the world" links change in the world with the action of the Holy Spirit. But the technological view of "the end of the world" expects to achieve complete domination over change in the world by mechanization.

The greatest significance of modern man's taking technology as the

object of his faith lies in technology's ability to bestow on man a feeling of having immense power. It has elevated man's power and his expanding will to a new height, but it has destroyed his individuality and uniqueness at the same time. It makes man stride towards a nameless power. His hidden adoration of technology is an adoration of Nietzsche's wille zur macht, or his own subjectivity. The German philosopher Heidegger therefore, points out that the prerequisite for technological development is a philosophy of subjectivity and a phenomenological metaphysics. The deepest urge that drives man to perform the experiment of a test-tube baby, Heidegger thinks, is his desire to create his own subjectivity.

Thus, man's adoration of technology implies a narrow form of humanism. In his study of Plato's Idea, Heidegger points out: with reason as his own centre, man makes himself the centre of the universe.

Nevertheless, because he is enslaved by material things, man is not able to obtain freedom through faith in technology. The reason is that he adores only his own subjectivity and has entered into an enclosed humanism. Man worships his own product - technology. His self-adoration is in fact an adoration of his own will power and the fantasy that he can dominate everything. In 1984 G. Orwell comments:



Because man is enslaved by material things, he is not able to obtain freedom through faith in technology....

We have no interest in the death of the others. We are only interested in power. We are not interested in wealth, luxury growth or happiness, but only in power, a pure form of power. Power is not a means, it is an end. We are its priests. God is power.

In short, taking technology as our religion is to substitute the god of power for the God of love.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above we see that technological development has caused the object of man's ultimate faith to change from a transcendent object - God or heaven - to a subjective object - a this worldly object, even man himself. Man's subjectivity substitutes for the original object, God. Moreover, technological development has weakened man's consciousness of his ultimate belief, causing him to be aware only of what he can possess or control in this world. If we take the faith we are conscious of as an explicit faith, and that which we are unconscious of as an implicit one, then technological development has changed man's originally explicit ultimate faith into an implicit faith. So-called civilized man's faith in technology is expressed only in the pursuit of scientific theories or techniques. As a result, man is no longer conscious of the religious commitment hidden underneath. Heidegger refers to this as "existential forgetfulness." Man is not only oblivious of his being, but even unconscious of such forgetfulness. The world is secularized because of technological development. The basic characteristic of this secularization is the transformation of our ultimate faith from the transcendent to the internalized, from the explicit to the implicit.

Of course the tendencies toward secularization are different for people of learning or intellectuals and the mass of common people. The secularization for intellectuals is a process of transforming the object of faith from a transcendent to an internalized one, or from an explicit to an implicit one. This may lead them to objectivism, rationalism, or even, by virtue of their "existential forgetfulness," to nihilism. However the faith of common people still retains its transcendent object, e.g. God, the deities. Since they experience deeply the activities of their faith, they preserve a certain degree of explicitness. Nevertheless, the faith of the common people cannot escape the secularizing process. The common people tend to judge the relationship between man and the transcendent on an utilitarian basis.

Superstition is in reality a form of utilitarian faith. The common people never engage themselves in any scientific research; they only relish the fruit of it, and always view technology from the point of view of money and happiness. They turn to God only to escape the hustle and bustle and the spiritual emptiness of a technological society. However, they still employ the same utilitarian standard to judge the

relationship between man and God.

Furthermore, although the faith of the common people has a certain explicitness, this kind of explicit consciousness is utilitarian and lacks deep reflection. It is not completely mature and cannot be considered true consciousness. Therefore, it is unable to make explicit a real ultimate faith.

On the one hand, modern man still has an ultimate faith. On the other hand, he is not satisfied with an internal, implicit or utilitarian faith and so man feels anxious. In order to remove the anxiety man must not confine himself to an internalized faith, but must make explicit his transcendent faith changing the internal to a transcendent faith. Moreover, man should cease to believe blindly and unconsciously. He should make his implicit faith explicit, and change his unconscious faith into a conscious one. In this way the soul of modern man will begin to experience a bright future.