Thinkpieces

THE ATHENS/JERUSALEM TEMPLATE AND THE TECHNO-SECULARISM THESIS—KICKING THE CAN DOWN THE ROAD

by John C. Caiazza

Abstract. The publication of my article "Athens, Jerusalem, and the Arrival of Techno-secularism" (2005) in *Zygon* was followed by twenty-one responses, most of them critical. In this essay I reply by clarifying the earlier one, separating out its two major theses: the Athens/Jerusalem template and the techno-secularism thesis. The Athens/Jerusalem template is a typology that provides a historical basis for understanding why religion/science conflicts persist by showing that the contrasts between intellectual knowledge and revealed knowledge are permanent features of Western cultural history. Postmodern criticisms often have a negative edge, rejecting "canonical" accounts but not presenting alternative explanations. Historical context is helpful in understanding religion/science conflicts, which continue to exist. The present cultural situation is that technology is replacing religion—and science—as the dominant condition and theory of our culture. Evidence for the techno-secularism thesis can be seen in the nature of electronic entertainment, which invades the silence required for religious contemplation and obscures the scientific laws that are the basis for the new technology.

Keywords: Athens and Jerusalem; history; postmodern; religion; science; science and religion; secularism; technology; techno-secularism.

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NO ROSE WITHOUT THORNS

My essay "Athens, Jerusalem, and the Arrival of Techno-secularism," which appeared as the first of the articles in *Zygon's* Fortieth Anniversary Symposium (Caiazza 2005), proposed two independent but related theses: (1) that the religion/science debate could be interpreted under the rubric of Athens and Jerusalem as elements of the history of the West and (2) that in the present age technology has replaced both religion and science as the chief cultural aspect of Western and, inferentially, world civilization.

Many of the responses to my essay that *Zygon* published during the year had a strongly critical edge to them, and, as Gregory Peterson pointed out in his (2005, 876), the symposiasts in general were "dissatisfied" with the essay. After four issues of *Zygon* featuring twenty-one such responses, I now feel like the clown who sits atop the dunk tank at the fair where patrons throw something at the target in order to watch the clown plunge into the water.

In this essay it is not my desire, however dripping wet, to throw brickbats back at the symposiasts. Instead I want to draw something out of the experience that may be of use to the readers of *Zygon* and to "kick the can down the road." In this circumstance some brief notes about myself and the origin of the essay may be useful.

A shorter version of the 2005 essay originally appeared in *Modern Age* in 2002 and was intended for a readership made up of conservative intellectuals whom I could assume were mostly Christian and some Jewish but for all of whom the idea of Western civilization was a benign reality to be improved, cherished, and defended. The essay was written for an interdisciplinary audience and was intended to cover several ideas I had at the time about secularism that had been brought about by my reading books by Stephen J. Gould (1999), William James ([1945] 1955), and Robert Coles (1999) in the space of about a year. I invented the term *techno-secularism* (to the degree that any such term is newly invented) to describe a new phenomenon that I thought was making the old "war" between science and religion irrelevant.[1]

As for myself, who may have appeared to the readers of *Zygon* as somewhat new and strange, I am an "independent scholar" who was for twenty-eight years an academic administrator, mostly in the financial aid offices of colleges and universities in the greater Boston area. I received my bachelor's degree from a Jesuit university and my doctorate in the philosophy of science at Boston University in 1972. I have more than forty publications, most of which concern the impact of science on politics and culture, that have appeared as essays and book reviews in right-wing intellectual journals. In summer 2005 I participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities–sponsored seminar "Religious Diversity and the Common Good" run by Alan Wolfe at Boston College. For the record, I am a "cradle Catholic" whose religious sensibilities were formed prior to the Second

Vatican Council, more Mother Angelica than Cardinal Bernardin, and whose politics are socially conservative, more William Bennett than Milton Friedman.

ATHENS AND JERUSALEM, CITIES IN TIME

A large part of the essay was based on the positing of two cities, Athens and Jerusalem, as forces or patterns or types in history, in this following the insight of many great intellects from Tertullian in the third century C.E. to Leo Strauss (1953) in the twentieth. Athens is taken to represent secular knowledge based principally on the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers but extended to include what human beings have learned on their own by means of experience and logic, including philosophy but also systems of law, art, and history. Jerusalem is taken to represent revealed knowledge, or what is discovered in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles along with the commentary and traditions that have accompanied them, the principal characteristic of which is that its doctrines are given—revealed by divine agency because otherwise unavailable to the human intellect.

These cities are types or general patterns that I traced, however sketchily, from the beginning of the Christian era to the present, intending to show them as not only in opposition to each other but sometimes in concordance, as in the writings of Maimonides, whose purpose was to "harmonize Judaism with philosophy, to reconcile the Bible and Talmud with Aristotle" (Husik [1916] 1968, 236), and Thomas Aquinas, whose purpose was to reconcile Christian doctrine with Aristotle. The issue of discerning patterns and types throughout large spans of history is tricky business, and much depends on what evidence is brought to bear and how pieces of evidence are related to the general pattern. In the case of Athens and Jerusalem, the evidence lies, I think, in two facts: first, that each has its own epistemology, known classically as in the distinction between faith and reason, and, second, that both have been represented in two thousand years of history as vital and powerful traditions that between them have shaped the West. In a recent article emeritus professor Jeffrey Hart of Dartmouth University refers to the Athens-and-Jerusalem template as a "Master Narrative" for understanding the history of the West (2005, 364).

Athens and Jerusalem are at the core of Western being—not Confucius, not Buddha, not Muhammad, not the Aztecs and Incas. And it is the tension between Athens and Jerusalem that generates the peculiar and powerful energy of the West. There is tension between the goal of knowledge through intellect and the goal of spiritual aspiration to holiness. They are not incompatible, but they are not altogether compatible, either. (Hart 2005, 365)

The Athens/Jerusalem template was devised as a way to make sense of a present cultural fact. Several symposiasts claimed that the conflict I assumed between science and religion was not in fact the case, that the

conflict was between "scientism" and true religion and was therefore a cultural artifact at best. That there is no ultimate conflict between religion and science, as the Holy Spirit informs them, I firmly believe from the writings of Maimonides and Aquinas. Several modern thinkers including Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and Edmund Husserl have made impressive attempts to overcome any perceived conflict. However, we then face a conundrum, namely, that the religion-science "wars" are still with us even as the means on an intellectual basis are available to overcome the conflict (Polkinghorne 2005). I believe that the conflictual situation is not simply an accidental result of certain cultural forces but has its own intrinsic motive lying in the separate natures of religion and science. By projecting the current conflictual situation between scientism and (Christian) religion back to the origins of the West I am attempting to explain the persistence of an experienced reality, that is, the need for a bridge between science and religion, a need originating in the more general and historically discernible tension between "the goal of knowledge through intellect, and the goal of spiritual aspiration to holiness" (Hart 2005, 365).

The competition between revealed religion and modern science comes about, I believe, because both present cogent, comprehensive explanations of the universe based on different sets of premises. Modern science rejects first of all the miraculous, the idea that explanations of physical events include supernatural intervention, because science tends to explain all physical events in the universe in terms of a network of scientific laws and will not accept that the network can be disrupted or that the causes posited by science need amplification or reinforcement in any way. But modern science goes further, rejecting not only the miraculous but also the teleological, denying not only the words of the Lord God but those of Aristotle as well. The denial of purpose—of events detected by intended ends—means that the universe in scientific terms can be understood only in terms of the ideal of scientific explanation, the network of scientific laws that operate in such a way as to give no indication of any divine or metaphysical aspect underlying them. Given that the assumptions underlying the scientific ideal of explanation are methodological and may have nothing to do with ultimate reality, it is intellectually possible for religious believers to understand scientific explanation as a kind of expedient that is self-limited by the deliberate exclusion of the transcendent and the purposeful, and thereby appreciate science's aims and ideals as amenable to religious understanding. In this way, a resolution of the conflict between religion and science ultimately is possible.

THE POSTMODERN CRITIQUE

Immediately upon reading the above, the many academics of postmodern sensibility will ask, Why just Athens and Jerusalem? Why not other cities

such as Kyoto, Ciudad Mexico, and so on? Why limit our typologies to the Western horizon only? (King 2005, 537) Inclusion of these other cities and other non-Western sensibilities will allow us to combine our various narratives into a fusion that will better enlighten us and lead to progress. In response, I would point out that Athens and Jerusalem are *types* and that "Athens" as representative of secular knowledge includes Göttingen, where much of quantum physics was developed; Manchester, which was a center of the industrial revolution; New York City; Tokyo; New Delhi; and, in ancient days, Syracuse and Rome. Likewise, "Jerusalem" as the representative of revealed knowledge includes Mecca, Rome, Assisi, and the New England/upstate New York region of the United States from which has emanated the Shakers, Seventh Day Adventists, Protestant fundamentalism, the Mormons, and Christian Science. Of course, in this response, there is still an implied exclusion based on the difference between revealed religions and those which are not and an assumption that the history of the West is of critical importance, points that I deal with later in this essay.

Reference to Athens and Jerusalem as types can refer not exclusively to traditions in Western Christendom but to universal aspirations of human existence, "the goal of knowledge through intellect, and the goal of spiritual aspiration to holiness." These goals are not exclusive to the West, and intimations of them can be found in all human cultures, but such generalization was beyond the scope of my essay—and beyond my scholarly powers and knowledge in any case. When discussing or portraying any of the "big" (universal) aspects of human existence, we are usually limited at first to discussing them within the confines of a specific tradition. An attempt at a universal narrative taking in all cultures which would follow the differing goals of knowledge and holiness as they worked themselves out in history would surely be welcome, but it would take a Vico, a Hegel, or a Toynbee to do it.

The postmodern critique, to go once again from a particular example (in this case, my own) to the universal, tends to too often impute negative characteristics to the authors of texts it disagrees with. An unacceptable aggressiveness or maleness is perceived not by the actual content or intended meaning of a text but by the mere manner of its presentation, by its general topic if it addresses privileged entities, by the use of gendered pronouns, or if it happens to be logically arranged or forcefully expressed (King 2005, 538). Then, the imputation of malign motives can be made as if the author of the criticized text is on the side of oppression, and the author him-/herself can be characterized as if the writer were a member of a 1930s white-shoe cabal of elitist educators (Samuelson 2005, 335–37, 349). Once this is assumed, in an ultimate irony, a declaration of toleration can be used as an explicit ground for intolerance of, for example, the "medieval"! (Samuelson 2005, 337) There is a further irony here, however, in that postmodernism, according to a dictionary of philosophical terms, is "a

modern movement in philosophy and the humanities that rejects the opti-mistic view that science and reason will improve humanity; it rejects the notion of sustained progress through reason and the scientific method" (Pence 2000, 43). In this sense, my essay reflects what can be termed a postmodern view.

The challenge of postmodernism offers an alternative to this or indeed any exclusivist narrative or so-called "master" or "meta-" narrative, namely, the inclusion of all narratives with special attention to the stories of women, racial minorities, workers, non-Western cultures, and the oppressed gener-ally. Applied to the conflict between science and religion, the postmodern sensibility would offer non-Western (and non-male) contributions to the development of science (Peterson 2005, 878) and extend the meaning of *religion* to include American Indian, Eastern, and so-called pagan religions and would finally determine that the whole idea of conflict was invalid to begin with. In this seemingly gentle manner, the multiple issues that lie between religion and science would be erased and the so-called war be-tween religion and science revealed as a social construct and not inherent in any putative realities that each side has referred to or defended. This postmodern strategy has the emotional aspect, however, of an overbearing nanny shutting down the game of "Sorry" when the children get too loud. Although the nanny may be right that the game is a source of loud conflict among her charges, the children fumingly retain the belief that each of them was in the right, which means that the conflict will inevitably arise again.

But then what issues are at stake, so real and so inherent in the texture of things that science and religion must continue to make an effort to address each other (the purpose, after all, of the journal *Zygon*)? While it is true that to an extent the "war" between religion and science is a social con-struct of the nineteenth century (Gould 1999, 99; Caiazza 2005), the fact of conflict is still apparent and has underlying motives. Contemporary advocates of what can be termed a scientistic point of view (Haught 2005) have taken explicit aim at religion, and, although their primary target is the Christian religion, no other expression of religious belief is exempted from what can accurately be termed their attack. When Daniel Dennett states in his popular book that Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection is a "universal acid" that will eat away at the foundations of religious belief, he explicitly mentions the Baptist church, but if he fore-sees the Baptist churches emptying, he apparently sees as little chance for the survival of Buddhist temples, Jewish synagogues, Catholic cathedrals, Muslim mosques, ashrams, or Korean storefront churches (Dennett 1995, 516). Postmodernism may attempt to relieve the idea of conflict in regard to religion and science while broadening our social horizons, but the un-derlying issues will not go away.[2]

The exclusion of canonical "meta-narratives" falsifies history and prevents any desired fusion of horizons while attempting to make the case for progressive politics through the back door, as it were. It is easier to collect stories about the struggles of the dispossessed or present "case studies" of non-Western cultures than to construct a postmodernist narrative that will take all points of view into its account. Erecting a postmodern critical perspective of religion and science requires detailed knowledge of the issues involved but above all a theme or narrative strain to make sense of all of the various details. Postmodernism, however, is often too entirely critical to do such work; often it does not render a comprehensive picture of its own and does not leave our minds anything to work on.

THE USES OF HISTORY

Constructing an interpretation of history means integrating a large set of facts in a narrative context that has hopefully persuasive authority of which my Athens/Jerusalem template is an example. As between competing narratives we must perforce choose our own, at least for starters, but if there is any hope of proceeding to a master narrative or a real fusion of horizons we must be able to compare various accounts, and this, I believe, is best accomplished by interpretive history. The relations between religion and science are probably seen better in a historical context than in any other (with the exception of the accounts of geniuses who can tell us from their own direct knowledge of both—a Pascal or possibly an Einstein). I am aware that I am not the first person to think this; others such as R. G. Collingwood ([1945] 1955) and Ian Barbour (1997) have already provided such accounts.

In the case of arguing from the Athens/Jerusalem template, I am attempting to integrate the facts associated with such things as Greek philosophy and modern science, and the Bible with both its Hebraic and Christian components, discerning a twin history of secular (philosophic and scientific) knowledge and revealed (biblical and traditional) knowledge. Secularism as I have defined it is designated negatively as that kind of knowledge that does not come from the Bible and positively as originating in Greek philosophy and continuing in various manifestations until the rise of modern science, which, I contend, plausibly continues the secular tradition. The techno-secularism thesis should not be understood to be an assertion of the world historical dominance of technology, a thesis I never intended to maintain and is a Marxist one as maintained back in the 1950s by historian V. Gordon Childe (1955). Following Christopher Dawson and other historians such as Gibbon and Toynbee, I think that if any one element can be seen to be the most influential in culture generally, it is religion (Samuelson 2005, 343). The whole point of my techno-secularism essay is that technology is overcoming religion in contemporary Western culture and that this is not a good thing.

Although the template has application only with the development of Western culture as a combination of Christian and Hellenistic components, its origins can be traced to the first century C.E. when St. Paul accosted the Athenians in the Agora (Acts 17:22–33) and, prior to that, when in the days of ancient Israel the angels spoke to Abraham and the voice from the burning bush identified itself to Moses (Genesis 12:1–4; Exodus 3). The ancient Greeks as well as the Israelites had a monotheistic conception of God; the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes had discounted the figures in the Greek pantheon as mere myths, deducing that there was only one God. "God is one, supreme among gods and man, not at all like mortals in body or in mind," he declared (Wheelwright [1960] 1982, 32), and Aristotle had produced no less than two proofs for the existence of God. However, as noted by Pascal and Voltaire, there is an immense contrast between the Lord God of Israel, who was fully involved in human history, judgmental with an overwhelming if mysterious personality, and the god of Aristotle and the Greek philosophers, a passive being whose existence was not manifest in history or human experience but only as the pale result of deduction. In the contrast between the Greek and Israelite conceptions of the natures of the One God can be seen a contrast between secular and revealed knowledge for the first time. While medieval theologians would eagerly see in the Greek conception of the One God a rational confirmation of their revealed faiths, secular knowledge in the modern era represented by modern science has been no better than agnostic in its intellectual attitude toward the One God and therefore significantly less amenable to incorporation into a unified theology.

Several symposiasts disagreed with my understanding of secularism, seeing it not as an opponent to revealed religion or religion generally but as amenable to religious understanding and penetration (Szerszynski 2005; Jackelén 2005; Oviedo 2005). It is true that film, television, cable, and the Internet all have been energetically utilized for religious presentations; however, the benefits of technology for religious persuasion are equivocal. I personally attended a church where upon entering Christian hymns were transmitted through a sound system so loud that its decibel level rivaled that of rock music concerts, driving out all possibility of prayer and meditation. More important, technology becomes an opponent of revealed religion in its overall effects and implied ideology of human self-transcendence, as I tried to explain at the end of the first techno-secularism essay. One symposiast stated that secularism originated in Reformation times and was in reality an issue of the political power of the Roman Catholic Church, whose "ultimate political impotence" had been "realized" by the French and Russian revolutions (Samuelson 2005, 344). While the political power of the Catholic Church is indeed a topic for discussion and likely criticism, it is a fact independent of secularism as I use the term. However, for better or worse, Roman Catholic political power can still be

effective, as the late Pope John Paul II's involvement in Polish politics demonstrates, since it often is cited as a major factor in the collapse of Soviet Communism (see Gaddis 2006).[3]

The original techno-secularism essay is an example of cultural criticism, but it is important to note that referencing religion and science to a cultural plain does not resolve the differences, conflicts, or resemblances between them. Rather, cultural analysis tends to relativize truth claims by reducing them to power relationships or the effect of historical epochs. Such a mode of analysis can surely resolve the perception of conflict—but at the cost of delegitimizing both religion and science by making them expressions of culture rather than forces that influence culture. About the nature of facts and argumentation in historical analysis, the contention between technological and cultural causes soon becomes circular, for the citation of a given historical fact is not in itself definitive as whether in Manchu China (Samuelson 2005, 348) a technological or a religious element was the outright cause of its collapse in the face of Western pressures. In history we are faced with matters of interpretation, and the final truth about such matters does not lie in a one-to-one correspondence between the citation of facts and an independent reality so much as in the coherence and plausibility of the entire historical presentation (Samuelson 2005, 341).

THE TECHNOLOGIZATION OF WESTERN CULTURE

The techno-secularism thesis—that technology has overcome both religion and science as modes of understanding the universe and human existence in contemporary Western culture—is provable and its plausibility discernible independent of the Athens/Jerusalem template of history. Indeed, several of the stronger critics of my essay agree as to the malignant effects of technology in contemporary culture (King 2005, 540; Tirosh-Samuelson 2005, 39, 40). Nonetheless, there is a connection between the template and the techno-secularism thesis in that the phenomenon of techno-secularism is used to explain why the religion/science conflict has become moot despite its continuing and undeniable presence in contemporary culture.

While I did not intend the techno-secularism thesis as a universal world-historical explanation, I would maintain that religion, even from a point of view that presumes its diversity, is distinct from the scientific sensibility. Religion and science view the universe and humankind's existence within it in different terms, using different means of discovery and placing different values on both the universe and human existence. As for the revealed religions, by which I mean the Abrahamic faiths (I term them *revealed* on epistemological grounds), their common ground is that for them the universe is created by the One God, an understanding that is reflected for believers in some manner in all the modes of physical existence; hence, for

the revealed religions the issues with a naturalistic, not to say materialistic, science tend to be sharply drawn (Kaufman 2005).

My point is that in the last several decades in our culture technology is replacing religion—and science—as the dominant condition and theory of our culture. References to religious diversity will not, I think, deflect this fact, because it affects all religions and the very idea of religion. Technology is not a brute fact, but it can no longer be said, for example, merely that electronic technology provides the most common mediums through which we communicate (other than face-to-face), for it is also providing the culture's symbols, interpretations, and ethical tropes. The medium, as McLuhan famously said, has become the message.

To repeat an earlier question (in an aggressive postmodernist formulation), if the techno-secularism thesis is limited to the Christian West, why should anyone except neo-medievalists, neo-conservatives, Protestant intellectuals, and pre-Vatican II Catholics care? The answer is that, despite the numerous examples of diverse religious expressions now current, according to recent polls more than 80 percent of United States citizens still identify themselves as Christian, so the issue of techno-secularism even if limited to Christians is of interest to a large majority of religious believers in the United States. To note the fact of a Christian majority is I know a sensitive point, but to ignore it is to distort an important present fact of our culture, and added to it is that undeniable fact of the worldwide influence of Western culture even in its current de-Christianized and degraded form. (The question of why, if the great majority of religious believers in the United States are Christians, the fact is not more apparent in our culture is not one to be answered here, except as techno-secularism is a factor.) Techno-secularism is a worldwide phenomenon, I submit. The degree of technologization in Asian cultures is easily seen by turning over the last purchased piece of photographic, electronic, or computer equipment and reading its place of manufacture. Again, techno-secularism is not a good thing, but a fact must be stated descriptively without the inference that the author relating it thinks that it is necessarily a good thing. All religious persons in the United States should strive to correct our culture from within, not only for ourselves but because it is becoming the world's culture as well.

The techno-secularism thesis is a strongly defined general claim about contemporary culture—that technologization has overcome religion and science as the primary means of understanding the universe—and some symposiasts naturally criticized it on that score. To clarify my argument, I present the example of the flat screen—that screen on laptops, personal computers, televisions, iPods, and video games (formerly the flat face of vacuum cathode ray tubes but increasingly quartz and plasma screens). Such screens are ubiquitous at home, work, and in educational settings and have become in many ways the means by which we in our culture

increasingly experience the world beyond our immediate surroundings. The effects of the flat screen can be seen separately on religion and science, and my argument on behalf of the techno-secularism thesis is extended for each in the following paragraphs.

Religion. Religion of any sort involves well-known elements such as ritual and myth, but on the level of personal experience it involves the ability and willingness to be alone with oneself, to meditate and consider in the most intimate personal terms meaning in one's own life. In the crudest sense this operation requires periods of silence and in ethical terms requires self-denial. Distractions and temptations of the flesh are the well-established barriers to religious contemplation and the pursuit of a religious lifestyle. Distractions and temptations—and doubt—there have always been, as St. Augustine and others have compellingly described (Coles 1999, 40). Contemporary levels of technologization, however, have intensified the distractions especially by providing an entire entertainment industry to fill up the waking hours left empty by labor-saving devices. Modern humans do not have to spend twelve-hour days working or home-making to provide for family sustenance, and the time leased from drudgery has now been filled with electronic entertainments presented on the flat screen. Entire industries have arisen to in effect keep us distracted. Flat-screen distractions eliminate the contemplative or meditative moments necessary not only for religious thought to take hold but for mental health. George Gerbner, an expert on television violence, stated that he sees television not as a medium but rather as "a cultural environment into which our children are born and which tells all the stories . . . [and] . . . who tells the stories of a culture really governs human behavior. It used to be the parent, the school, the church, the community. Now it's a handful of global conglomerates that have nothing to tell, but a great deal to sell" (quoted in Oliver 2005). The flat screen that has become ubiquitous has, as it were, its own ethics and theology, but its ethics does not reveal anything uplifting about human nature, and its theology does not reveal anything enlightening about the nature of God. Pleasures of the flesh have as well been enhanced, often by virtual means, so that adventure, intellectual challenge, and sexual titillation are available through the flat screens of contemporary technology but in a manner that leaves us detached from the real thing. Electronic imagery is probably the primary source of the sexualization of our culture.

In this practical way, technology inhibits religion, while on the ideological level, technological application replaces ethical self-awareness, for the primary assumed value of our culture is that technology will make it possible in magical ways to alter our physical environment so that there is no barrier between wish and fulfillment. Dedication to the results of external technological alteration rather than to internal character development

is the effective if implied ethic of techno-secularism and leaves the One God and religious values generally out of account.

Science.   In the scientific vision, the universe has a structure that can be detected by close observation and experiment and its general lineaments described in the form of abstract mathematical laws. The detection of various phenomena such as sunspots or the cellular nature of protoplasm and the theories proposed to explain the phenomena, such as the Second Law of Thermodynamics or Newton's law of universal gravitation, make up the historical glories of modern science. Yet it is precisely this sense of discovery and structure that is obscured by the overriding cultural presence of technology. The sports enthusiast is limited to his couch as a playing field as he watches in real time on television a soccer game broadcast from another continent, but he is unaware that the television signal is being bounced off a satellite in geosynchronous orbit and oblivious to the research of Faraday and Maxwell on which television transmission is based. Regarding television, critic Camille Paglia has noted the manner in which advertisements and shows are fired in very rapid fashion without transitions, leaving viewers titillated but confused, in glaringly enhanced colors not seen in nature and with sound effects similarly cut up and delivered in a loud, abrupt manner without transitions or melody. For the television sports fan and the general viewer, the value of science lies not in discovery or intellectual apprehension but in its ability to transform one's personal environment, virtually on command—an understanding that constitutes technology as magic.

On the ideological level, scientific rationality is foreclosed as an aspect of the universe as randomness and self-will enabled by technological applications become the cultural means by which we increasingly come in contact with the world outside of ourselves. The idea of a rational, external reality whose lineaments must be understood on its own terms if we are to make sense of it is no longer required. Reason has been replaced by fantasy.

Religion and science, whatever their differences, have in common that they are the primary explanations we have available for the nature of the universe and the place of human existence within it. However their differences are explained or explained away, they both address the fundamental issues of human life. Technology as exemplified in the flat screen does not give substitute answers for the questions about human existence; it rather prevents the questions from arising at all and in this manner trumps both religion and science. There are no techno-secular answers that replace those given by either religion or science; there is only distraction, diversion, and titillation, and neither faith nor reason is referenced. I am not implying that the effects of the flat screen or of techno-secularism are necessarily permanent, but to overcome them we have a lot of work to do.

NOTES

1.   Discourse about technology and culture generally, and technology and religion, has a long history. Among such authors not referenced in the original essay but who are essential to a more scholarly treatment are Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, and Philip Hefner (Roy 2005).

2.   Other current scientist authors who are explicit opponents of religion include Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Geoffrey Dobson. See Matt Donnelly's review essay "Old Enemies" (2005). Dennett's antireligious viewpoint is evident in the title of his new book, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006).

3.   Norbert Samuelson obscures other facts about religious identity. The "ultimate political impotence" of the Roman Catholic Church could hardly have been settled by the Russian Revolution, as he states, since for the last eight hundred years the dominant religion in Russia has been the Russian Orthodox Church. It was the Russian Orthodox Archmetropolitan of Moscow who blessed the election of Yeltsin in the name of the Trinity, which signified the end of the Soviet experiment of bringing heaven down to Earth directed by Marx's theory of "scientific socialism." He condemns Frederick Copleston, S.J., for being a "medievalist" (2005, 337), neglecting Copleston's widely known six-volume history of Western philosophy (Copleston 1964), which extends from the ancient Greeks to the twentieth century.

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