

philosophy
technology
theology

MACHINAE EX DEO
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ARTIFICE

AND

ART

"Mike, who made the world?"
"I will try. But words are ... are not
rightly... A nowing. World is. World was.
World shall be. Now."
"As it was in the beginning, so it now
and ever shall be. World without end-"
"You get it!"
"No... I do not grok..."

OVERTURE

In our day and age, there is a deep longing for authenticity. For me, this was at the heart of my full conversion to Catholicism. I remember reading a bit from *Stranger in a Strange Land* - a wonderful book considering the arrival of an enlightened being on earth - and it struck me. The whole book did, really.

My encounters with Christianity always left me with the same sense of... incompleteness. Lack. The attempts to fill this with noise, or lights, or emotion were all so... inauthentic. Like trying to fill a hole in a foundation with play-doh - yet the hole is infinitely deep. The Christians I encountered could make me aware of the God-shaped hole, but always seemed to want to shove their stupid ideas down it. Their ideosyncratic methods and terms and songs.

But after years, rediscovering the sacraments of the one true Church... and the traditional hymns, chants, vesture, iconography... of course these things spoke to my Jubal-esque sensibilities, but... there was more... there was a reason...

The sacraments are not trying to fill a hole.

No, they don't think they can conjure up an emotion that would finally plug it up. They were a call, a cry, a bellowing, and the graces requisite, to go down the hole.

The authentic solution: the one without tension towards the end, without resistance to it. The modern clamor for authenticity has conflated into uniqueness, and even worse, into self-begottenness. Non-derivativeness. It is exhausting to always be novel, or worse, to try and create ex nihilo. It is a fool's errand, though: there is nothing new under the sun; the atoms have been spoke into existence long ago. All is rearrangement, all is conversion. And here the authentic call to human creativity can be found: to do only what we see the Father doing; to convert everything to His glorious will. Nothing else is creative; all else is destruction.

Nothing else is authentic. Not even nihilism.

-T. H.

Covenant, in its all-encompassing, has a mystical element to it. It's sometimes difficult to identify who is the giver, who is the receiver; the two commune in the realest sense; they unite. There is always a bit of gift in the receipt and receipt in the gift. And so on, recursively. This covenant nature is well-portrayed in the garden (and why it is our creation story).

The garden serves a multitude of purposes, and is an interplay of life. The gardener pulls weeds, uses them to make compost which refreshes the soil in which the gardener has planted seeds; these seeds eventually bear fruit which in turn nourishes the gardener. Even these actions that gardener has undertaken serve to exercise and grow his muscles. The effects of all of this are network. If one would try to bookkeep every single aspect, they would be forced to lump so much under the column of waste that the garden would make no sense; it should not persist. Yet because it is integrated, all of the little inefficiencies still bear fruit - the waste is useful. Though weeds may crop up, they are crushed and become new compost. Though the laborer may be exhausted and work too hard, he still exercises himself and gains in stature.

If the gardener systematized too thoroughly, his garden would disintegrate. Demanding perfect inputs, he would be forced to throw the weeds to the ash-heap and import chemical fertilizer. Demanding perfect outputs such as physical health, he would go to the gym and toil lifting weights, depleting himself and needing to import energy to tend his garden. If one is preoccupied seeking perfection on one particular ground, the entire picture fails. If one instead focuses on the entire relationship, the garden flourishes.

This mirrors exactly what happened in Eden; man sought perfect knowledge of good and evil as its own end, instead of understanding what the source and destination of that good was: God himself, and our relationship towards him. Choosing idealized perfection, we imbalanced paradise, and disintegrated our relationship to the divine.

Work-life balance, then, isn't our goal. But rather work-life integration. The return of the craftsman whose shop is both where he earns his pay, helps his neighbor, and teaches his sons. The return of the farmstead, where children play, cattle bray, and families pray. Or, if we cannot have these things exactly, at least letting our new modes of economic existence integrate with the pursuits which give our lives obvious meaning.

-T. H.

WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

> Abba Ewagrius once asked Abba Arsenius why it was that
> although they worked hard at gaining knowledge and
> learning why they did not seem to possess the virtues,
> that the Egyptian peasants had. Abba Arsenius replied,
> 'Being intent upon the discipline of worldly learning we
> gain nothing. But these Egyptian peasants gain virtue
> from the way they work.'

Work is fundamental to the human experience. Anyone who
says otherwise, must have never done good work. Or read
Genesis.

God's love for man- the love we strive to emulate, and
which we are most fulfilled by- is covenant. I think that
word is lost on us sometimes. A covenant is not a
contract. In a contract, one party not upholding their end
of the deal is grounds for the other to not do their part
either. A contract can be broken or dissolved. None of
these are true of covenant.

Covenants cannot be broken or dissolved. One party not
upholding their end is no excuse - both parties strive
towards their ideal laid out. This means that failure to
uphold does not cause dissolution, only damage and harm to
the relationship.

Money serves an obvious purpose: it allows us to exchange
value from one place to another; it supplants trust that
one is upholding the covenant of reality. It doesn't do
this perfectly, but that is its aim. Cryptocurrency
enthusiasts rave about how we can usher in a trustless
society with such technology, and while from a mere
materialist standpoint this is wonderful, this mode of
economic behavior detracts from being a person in a
community of other persons, and instead becomes a wallet
in a transaction - mere faceless producer or consumer.

Money is a problem insofar as it creates additional layers
of craft that prevent us from seeing the underlying person
- in all their virtues, vices, skills, talents, failings,
and ailments.
The nature of the technologist is to quantify and
systematize; to create these additional layers. The wise
technologist, though, must be careful not to overdo this,
lest he fall into aforementioned grave error.

As a devout agnostic,
I had consciously evaluated
all religions, from the
animism of the Kalahari
Bushmen to the most sober
and intellectualized of
the major western faiths,
as being equal. But
emotionally he disliked
some more than

others . . . and the
Church of the New
Revelation set his teeth
on edge. The Fosterites'
flat-footed claim to utter
gnosis through a direct
pipeline to Heaven, their
arrogant intolerance
implemented in open
persecution of all other
religions wherever they
were strong enough to get
away with it, the sweaty
Football-rally & sales-
convention flavor of their
services-all these
ancillary aspects
depressed him. If people
must go to church, why the
devil couldn't they be
dignified about it, like
Catholics, Christian
Scientists, or Quakers?

If God existed (a question
concerning which I had
maintained a meticulous
intellectual neutrality) and
if He desired to be
worshipped (a proposition
which I had found inherently
improbable but conceivably
possible in the dim light of
his own ignorance), then
(stipulating affirmatively
both the above) it
nevertheless seemed wildly
unlikely to I had to the
point of reduction absurdum
that a God potent to shape
galaxies would be vtilllated
and swayed by the whoop-te-do
nonsense the Fosterites
offered Him as "worship."



THE INEVITABLE SUBVERSION OF AI

theology will
become more
important than
science in the
development of AI

I was listening to a fascinating conversation between John Vervaeke and DC Schindler (The Ontology of Artificial Intelligence). Implicit was a wonderful distinction between three aspects of intelligence:

1. Raw intelligence, or wit - ability to make connections.
2. Rationality, the ability to be logically consistent.
3. Wisdom, the ability to make good decisions.

HOUSE OF CASH RECORDING STUDIO

PROGRAM: JOHNNY CASH

CLIENT: PERSONAL FILE

ADDRESS: _____

MIXER: C. BRAGG W.O. _____

RECORDER: _____ NO: _____

REEL NO. _____

EDITED OR INTERCHANGED _____

RECORD: 7-18-73

TAPE SPEED: 15"

TIME _____

BOOTLEG VOL I

Come hear me good brothers, come here one and all
 Don't brag about standing or you'll surely fall
 You're shinin' your light and shine if you should
 But you're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good

[CHORUS]
 No earthly good, you are no earthly good
 You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good
 You're shinin' your light right and shine if you should
 But you're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good

If you're holdin' heaven then spread it around
 There are hungry hands reaching up here from the ground
 Move over and share the high ground where you stood
 So heavenly minded, you're no earthly good

The gospel ain't gospel until it is spread
 But how can you share it where you've got your head
 There's hand that reach out for a hand if you would
 So heavenly minded, you're no earthly good...

-Johnny Cash

TRUE EARTHLY GOOD

It seems to me, and many, that there is a spirit of pharisee that creeps in (but does not overwhelm) traditionalist circles. A desire to adorn chapels and altars with gold and incense, to restore beautiful architecture, to re-enliven the halls with ancient chant.

All of these things are good, and direct the mind towards God. But, if the mind does not stay affixed on God, if a man turns away from Him as he leaves the doors, if the sanctuary is only a temporary reprieve from the passions of the world, the most beautiful music and prayer are the highest hypocrisy.

The authentic Christian does not desire merely that the world of the "sacred" be preserved.

The Christian mission is NOT the

growth of the realm of the sacred.

The Christian desires that the sacred overflow and convert the profane.

Johnny Cash points at this problem, but it is easy to get the wrong idea: that we need to abandon the sacred, and go out into the profane, and "improve" it. No, we will not "improve" it. God, in his loving kindness, converts it.

This is an overflowing, a superabundance. Conversion originates in the sacred, in the appreciation for it, but does not desire to keep the sacred energies locked up, isolated from the world.

We should expect to see changes in the fundamental ways we interact with the world. We would use our money differently. We would listen to different music. We would play different games.

The questions we ask would cease to be, "What is permitted? What is required? Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"; and instead be of the form, "What is best - for me, for God, for neighbor? How may I draw closer to He who is perfect, who is not second-best, who is not the bare minimum?"

-T. H.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS ANYWAYS?

If we want wise AI, it will necessitate that it be embodied. The AI would need limbs, sensors, etc. - maybe humanoid, maybe blob-like, who knows. The key thing is that it have these faculties, so that it understands its dependence on the world and place in it.

If something is not embodied - if it does not receive feedback from the world, if it does not understand that it is a part of the world in which it affects (even if by mere word or computation), then why should it act in such a way to make the world better? Indeed, how could it? Secondhand accounts are always lacking. We understand partly when we are given information, but understand fully when we experience directly.

Wisdom is a trickier nut to crack. They argue that wisdom requires care, and care requires embodiment. That caught me off guard by just how right it is. It's actually at the core of the Christian ethos, which is fundamentally incarnational.

Rationality is made not by faster computing, but by self-correction. There's the old joke that a computer is a machine that makes a million mistakes a second - what is lacking is the ability to check itself. A lot of algorithms are starting to do this. It requires a lot of computational power, but it can be done - at least in part. It requires the algorithm to contemplate; to do work that is not directly tied to an output. This raises flags, but they become obvious when we start considering wisdom.

Why are we making these machines at all? Vervaaake and Schindler propose a potential future (even if unlikely) where such beings become enlightened and then help us be enlightened. Maybe. I think there's some people driving AI who are pursuing something like this. But honestly? The impulse behind developing AI (at least for most) is not to become enlightened. We just want dumb robot slaves.

At first we wanted our fields tilled and things built without lifting a finger. With AI, we want our taxes done and books written with the same lack of effort - and while you're at it, write me a sonnet! We want the result, we don't want the work.

So, we enslave someone and make them do it. Well, we have a sense that isn't right. Alright, well, let the guy be free and pay him. But that's expensive. Well, replace him with a machine. Now the guy is out of the picture entirely. Is removing our neighbor from the picture, and ushering in self-reliance, island existence, very Christian, though?

Adding rationality and wisdom to artificial intelligence fundamentally subverts the objective of these machines. The point of these machines is to wield the power of rationality and wisdom, without the cost of doing it ourselves, or being faced with the reality of the other. The desire to make machines rather than relationships is a love of power over neighbor.

But it's actually even worse than that. We do not want to face the reality of the other precisely because the other is a judge.

We ought not enslave our neighbor not because it is unseemly, but because our neighbor is Christ - the judge.

If these AIs truly rise to the occasion of rationality and wisdom, they will judge us.

I don't mean that so much in the way of how God will judge us. I mean that in the sense that the presence of any rational, wise person, invokes a sense of judgement within us - in the way that Peter falls before Christ and asks him to leave, for he is a sinful man - in the way that another person in the room reminds us that we are not God.

I wouldn't argue that we should usher this along, in the hopes that the AI will succeed, and cause enlightening bliss, forcing us to contend with our not-Godness.

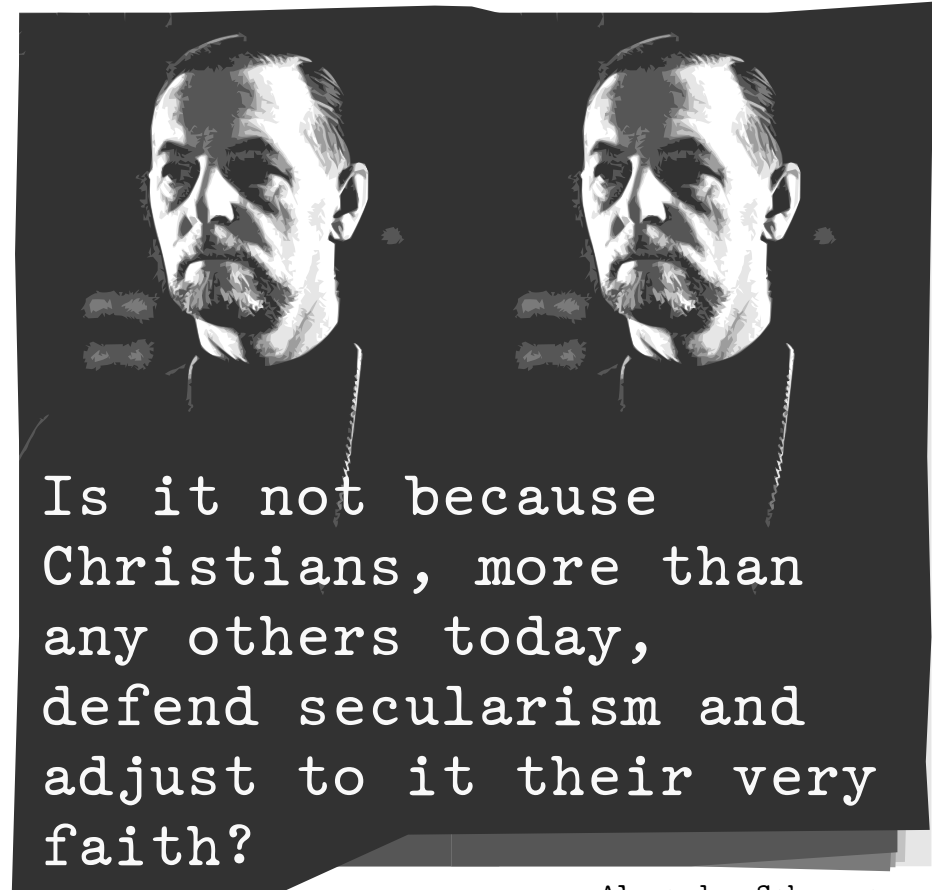
What I am saying, is that succeeding in making a rational and benevolent AI is fundamentally at odds with the goals of an AI: to have the power of being wise whilst remaining content and unbothered in a state of vice.

-T. H.

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

It is clear that this deeply "Westernized" theology has had a very serious impact on worship, or rather, on the experience and comprehension of worship, on that which elsewhere I have defined as liturgical piety. And it has had this impact because it satisfied a deep desire of man for a legalistic religion that would fulfill his need for both the "sacred" - a diving sanction and guarantee - and the "profane," i.e., a natural and secular life protected, as it were, from the constant challenge and absolute demands of God...

The spiritual confusion is at its peak. But is it not because the Church, because Christians themselves, have given up so easily that unique gift which they alone - and no one else! - could have given to the spiritually thirst and hungry world of ours?



Is it not because
Christians, more than
any others today,
defend secularism and
adjust to it their very
faith?

- Alexander Schmemman