Science fiction holds an interesting position regarding the promises of technology. On the one hand, there is great hope that technology can save us. From this perspective, it is almost a godlike force which has the power to transform our lives into something better and grant us everlasting life. Or it is the means for us to become gods and save ourselves. But science fiction stories also have a profound ambiguity toward technology as well. Just as often technology is portrayed as a terrible force with lethal powers to destroy our lives as humans, despite futile battles against it.

In contrast, science fiction has an almost universally uniform attitude toward traditional religion. It presents religion as backwards and antithetical to science and the modern world. Thus a common idea is that we should reject religion and embrace technology, which will give us what religion cannot. In this way, technology becomes almost a replacement religion. Yet at the same time science fiction still expresses some doubts and fears about technology and what will happen if we do embrace it.

Literature can be a useful means for understanding how our culture views technology and religion. Mary Midgley, a professor of philosophy, discusses the idea of myth, which is how we view the world. She says that “we must attend seriously to myths, metaphors, images and the other half-conscious apparatus of though surrounding the official doctrines.”

Scientists and non-fiction writers may not explicitly say that they are replacing traditional religion and using technology in its stead. But, she argues, these ideas are lying under the surface, as a motivation for the work they do. Fiction can often give voice and imagery to some of these concepts that remain hidden. There can also be an expression of emotions

---

connected to these ideas that would not be expressed in non-fiction. The emotions and desires expressed are complex, just as our culture’s attitudes toward technology are complex.

It is therefore helpful to study science fiction to understand the trends in our culture’s views. For this paper, over fifty science fiction short stories were analyzed to determine their attitudes toward religion and technology. Short stories were selected, as opposed to full-length novels or movies, because their short length often forces them to give a succinct distillation of main ideas, without as much development of plot and characters. Stories from across a range of time and authors were read. An emphasis was placed on recent stories, in an effort to see what the most recent trends are. However, early science fiction stories from the early 1900s were also read, along with stories by classic writers such as H. G. Wells, Isaac Asimov, and Arthur C. Clarke, in order to see some of the history of science fiction’s ideas about technology and religion.

Three major things were noted about science fiction’s attitude toward religion and technology. First, there is almost a universal rejection of traditional religion. Second, technology in many ways replaces what religion traditionally was thought to provide, including things such as promises of immortality, salvation and hope for the future. Finally, it was paradoxically noted that there is also a fear of technology going wrong and what that might mean. This perhaps indicates that although our society, like science fiction, is rejecting Christianity and placing its hope in technology, there are still doubts about whether that hope might turn out to be disastrous. Science fiction varies between seeing technology as our salvation or as our possible damnation.
The Rejection of Traditional Religion

Although science fiction may have an ambiguous perspective about technology, it has a uniform attitude toward traditional religion. Christians and religion are consistently portrayed as the enemies, who oppose any kind of technological progress. Science fiction definitely fits in with the modern scientific trend toward secularism and rejection of anything spiritual or religious. There is nothing spiritual beyond the physical world, and if we want any meaning in this world we must create it ourselves. Religious ideas are usually portrayed as having a natural explanation, whether from aliens (as will be explored later) or historical or scientific facts. It shows religion as seeking spiritual explanations for what should be explained scientifically.

Many, if not most, science fiction writers have been atheists and often speak quite aggressively about destroying religion. H. G. Wells wrote a book called *The Shape of Things to Come*, which shows a future government completing the positive act of destroying Christianity. Arthur C. Clarke, who wrote *2001: A Space Odyssey*, has spoken quite strongly about the need for getting rid of religion. A quote by him from *Childhood’s End* says that “Science can destroy religion by ignoring it as well as by disproving its tenets. No one ever demonstrated, so far as I am aware, the non-existence of Zeus or Thor — but they have few followers now.” In an interview, Arthur C. Clarke lamented that humans seem incapable of growing past religion because they are so gullible.

---

writer, said that science fiction is “the most effective tool for exploring the deepest questions; science fiction will help humanity shuck off vestiges of the supernatural.”\textsuperscript{6} Science and religion are seen as mortal enemies, and the progress of science can best be achieved by getting rid of religion which stands in its way.

There are a few exceptions, including one story that will be discussed in the conclusion, but in most science fiction stories, science and religion are portrayed as being at war and the consensus is that science should win. A few of the short stories examined show religion as violently opposed to science. In “Nightfall,” there is a planet that only sees the night sky when an eclipse happens every few thousand years. A religion has developed to explain this phenomena, and this religion violently opposes a group of scientists who are seeking a scientific explanation. The religious group attempts to destroy the observatory.\textsuperscript{7} This is fairly typical of portrayals of religious people, which are often portrayed as ignorant fanatics who will resort to violence to stop science.

This is also shown in the modern story “Winemaster,” where many people have converted themselves into tiny nano-machines which can live in tiny worlds inside our world. The U.S. government outlaws this practice, and there is a group of Christian extremists called the “Christian Promise” which stages terrorist attacks on the machine’s colonies, destroying many of them.\textsuperscript{8} The U.S. government is seen as complicit in this. In recent stories, the American government is often portrayed as synonymous with extremist Christianity, with both opposing technological development.


A couple of short stories did portray religious figures as positive main characters, but this is primarily because they are willing to sacrifice their religious faith to science. In “The Star” by Arthur C. Clarke, a Jesuit priest is part of a research team exploring an exploded nebula. The facts they discover lead him to realize that this exploded nebula, which destroyed an entire civilization, was likely the Star of Bethlehem. This causes the priest to question his faith as he doubts God’s goodness.\(^9\)

Even more strikingly, in “The Word to Space,” another Jesuit priest intervenes with communications to an alien planet. All transmissions from the alien planet have been religious propaganda of that planet’s religion, which has hindered scientific communication. The priest asks questions which leads to religious wars on the alien planet. The scientists here then help the aliens see they should separate church and state, and after that the scientists are free to communicate with earth.\(^10\) The idea is that religion may be okay in its place, as long as it doesn’t interfere with scientific progress. Religious people can be accepted by the scientific community, as long as they are willing to have science take precedence over religion.

“The Little Goddess” is a good encapsulation of science fiction’s naturalistic explanation for religious ideas. It shows a Hindu religion where a girl is selected to be endwelled by a goddess. But she rejects her visions of demons, and her special gifts, which were why she was selected, are later explained as schizophrenia. In the end, she is inhabited by artificial intelligences (which have been outlawed by the U.S. government). Using the scientific and medical knowledge of these robots, she decides to become a guru for the people, solving their problems, healing their diseases and making their lives better. She

---

concludes by saying, “There are many ways to be divine. There is the big divine, of ritual and
magnificence and blood and terror. Ours shall be a little divinity, of small miracles and
everyday wonders. Machines mended, programs woven, people healed, homes designed,
minds and bodies fed. I shall be a little goddess.”11 There is an underlying message that
religion is useless in fulfilling its promises of helping people. Science and technology provide
what religion cannot - including healing and hope.

This is the basis for a type of new religion on which people place their hopes. It is not
a religion based on spiritual hopes, but on scientific ones. Although there has been a rejection
of religion in the modern age, people still have a need for some kind of meaning. As we shall
see in the next section, the desires and hopes that had previously been found in religion are
now often being sought through science. This includes a promise of immortality, of hope for
progress, and a sense of meaning and purpose.

**Science Fiction as Religious Myth**

Having rejected traditional religion, science and science fiction turns to science and
technology as a possible source for hopes that used to be found in religion. Although many
scientists and atheists declare that we have no need for religion, and that it is in fact harmful,
there is still a hunger people have for some kind of meaning and significance. As Mary
Midgley says, our modern world can be overwhelming and confusing, and we need something
to provide order and meaning to the chaos.12 James Herrick agrees, saying that science fiction

---

provides this meaning for many people, as it gives explanations for where we are going and what our purpose should be.

Mary Midgley argues that even when scientists are trying to be modest about their claims, there are still very large dreams held by both scientists and science fiction writers about what science can do.\textsuperscript{13} They may say that they are merely doing empirical studies that have no bearing on religion and deeper questions, but they often still end up encroaching on religious topics. Some science fiction writers are not hesitant to describe what they’re doing in religious terms. Arthur C. Clarke described \textit{2001: A Space Odyssey} as the world’s first “billion dollar religious movie.”\textsuperscript{14} Lucas said that he hoped through Star Wars “to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people.”\textsuperscript{15} Ray Kurzweil argues that in this time of great technological change, “we need a new religion.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Space Travel as the Religion of Early Science Fiction}

A type of religious hope in science are especially evident when reading the early years of science fiction. There was a great deal of anticipation of what technology could do and the possibilities of it saving or uplifting humanity. There was an idea that we could become like God through the use of technology. Alexei and Cory Panshin said that “the driving impulse of Golden Age sf was a ‘quest for transcendence.’”\textsuperscript{17} Clute concurs that there were grand

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Herrick, \textit{Scientific Mythologies}, 20.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 13.
\end{flushright}
expectations of conquering nature, producing miracles through science, and settling the universe through space travel.¹⁸

Early science fiction believed we could achieve the next stage of evolutionary development through space travel. Space travel would be the pinnacle of human achievement in technology, and through it we could discover wonders in the universe. There has been a prevalent belief in the existence of highly advanced aliens, who would help us develop into a higher form of humanity.

There is an idea that space colonization is essential for man’s destiny.¹⁹ Reputable scientists such as Stephen Hawking have argued for the importance of humanity spreading out into space.²⁰ An early short story called “Crucifixus Etiam” illustrates the claim that space colonization is worth great sacrifice. A man working on Mars is losing his lungs due to the low levels of oxygen, but he decides it is worth it because he’s helping to make a new planet habitable, and helping achieve the destiny of humanity.²¹

There were also promises of marvels that could possibly be discovered by exploring space. In “A Martian Odyssey,” a man exploring Mars discovers a crystal which can heal anything, including cancer.²² As space travel was getting under way, there was anticipation that miraculous things could be discovered in the unknown universe.

Aliens, however, have been the biggest source of hope in science fiction’s portrayals of outer space and space travel. Although aliens in movies are often portrayed as threatening because it is more exciting, there are striking exceptions which show aliens as savior figures.

---

¹⁸ John Clute, “Science fiction from 1980 to the present,” in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*.
¹⁹ Herrick, *Scientific Mythologies*, 82.
²⁰ Ibid., 74.
²² Stanley Weinbaum, “A Martian Odyssey,” in *Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories*. 
*E.T.*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* all portray aliens in positive terms, as messianic figures who come to save humans from themselves.

In print science fiction there are even more positive portrayals of aliens and greater hopes in them being our saviors.\(^{23}\) In “The Sentinel,” the short story which was the basis for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, aliens left a pyramid on the moon to serve as a signal for when man evolved enough to travel to the moon and turn off the transmission. The narrator believed that aliens would then return, and their arrival will help bring humans into an even higher level of development. It is believed that aliens are the source for enlightenment and for helping us enter the next stage of evolution.\(^ {24}\)

As belief in God and angels have diminished, a belief in aliens has taken on some of those roles in science fiction. They are seen as watching over us from afar, helping us, and saving us from ourselves. This salvation is from a different form of sin than in traditional Christianity. It is not the sin of moral failing, but ignorance and a lack of evolutionary development. The science fiction writer says that “we did not fall because of a moral error; we fell because of an intellectual error.”\(^ {25}\) Aliens are therefore useful in saving us from this new form of sin. Because they are seen as more developed intellectually than we are, they can guide us intellectually and in developing.

The early years of science fiction focused on salvation being found in the stars. Interplanetary space travel would lead to the discovery of aliens or scientific discoveries that would lead us into the next stage of our development. Space travel and aliens are still definitely features in current science fiction, but they seem to be diminishing in potency. This

---

\(^{23}\) Gwyneth Jones, “The Icons of Science Fiction,” in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, 168.


may be due in part to the fact that having done some space travel, we have not discovered any of the miraculous wonders that were promised. As Jones says, because we have not discovered aliens, the great hopes surrounding them may be “banished from our imaginations.”

*Technology as Religious Myth: The Postmodern Era*

But this is not to say that the religious hopes in technology shown in science fiction are diminishing. In the cyber/postmodern era, there are even greater hopes in technology providing meaning, immortality and a type of salvation. As Hollinger says, science fiction has always been focused on transcendence, and the hopes of transcendence in the cyber age are placed squarely on technology.27

According to John Clute, science fiction had predicted much technological development during the twentieth century, but it was blindsided by the development of the internet and the resulting information explosion.28 It is still coming to terms with what it will mean. As will be shown later, science fiction is not always positive about these developments. But there are still great hopes in technology being something that will fulfill a religious need. As Clute says, “Technogeeks [are] ambitious to exercise godling sway over the mundane world.”29

Since the 1980s, computers and cyberspace have begun to join outer space as a dominant theme in science fiction. Instead of aliens, robots or supercomputers become the

---

26 Jones, “The Icons of Science Fiction,” 168.
29 Ibid., 72.
hope for guiding us into our next stage of evolution. A supercomputer takes on a godlike creative role in “Last Question.”\textsuperscript{30} The computer is repeatedly asked by humans across the millennia how to stop entropy. It continues working on this question after the universe has ceased to exist. (There is the implication that the supercomputer is immortal and infinite.) It finally comes up with the solution, and it brings back the universe, with language similar to that in Genesis 1. There is the idea that a supercomputer will have the ability to be the next god for us, able to rescue us from our ultimate demise.

There is also an idea of hope based on the internet and virtual reality. Cyberspace has caused people to become more separated from reality and more inclined to see virtual reality as real. In postmodernism, image is more important than reality.\textsuperscript{31} Recent science fiction stories play on this idea, envisioning a future where this is even more true, where people live to a greater degree in virtual reality. In “Synthetic Serendipity,” the world is like a virtual reality game.\textsuperscript{32}

As we shall see in the next section, this virtual world not always portrayed positively. However, there is a degree of hope underlying this idea that digitizing ourselves can lead to immortality and freedom from the problems and constraints of a physical body. One form of immortality can be found through human brains being downloaded to a computer. In “Learning to be me,” brains are downloaded to an implanted jewel in the brain, and after some time, the human brain is removed. A man is fearful of losing himself, but in the end he discovers his conscious self is actually the jewel, not the human brain.\textsuperscript{33} This idea is typical of

\textsuperscript{30} Isaac Asimov, “Last Question,” in \textit{The Asimov Chronicles}.
\textsuperscript{31} Andrew M. Butler, “Postmodernism and Science Fiction,” in \textit{Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction}, 144.
\textsuperscript{33} Greg Egan, “Learning to Be Me,” in \textit{Beyond Flesh}. 
postmodernism, which sees humanity itself as subjective. The technological can transform humanity and merge with it. As Dery says, “Cyberpunk is not antihuman. It is the reinsertion of human into the reality which its technology is in the process of shaping.”

There are other short stories which describe humanity using technology to achieve immortality. Without a belief in heaven and eternal life, there is still a desire to have some kind of immortality. It is thought that achieving any kind of continuation of life is a form of immortality. Midgley points out that it is worth questioning what type of life will be preserved, and whether it is really the type of life we would want to have. She also points out that if life doesn’t have meaning now, just continuing it forever would not provide any kind of meaning in the future. Science fiction also shows some of these doubts. Even as it shows technology giving the opportunity to live forever, it does have some questions about what that will mean.

In “Ancient engines” a scientist has invented a machine which can last forever, until the end of the universe, but one of his earlier prototypes resents not living very long. There is discussion about whether is worthwhile pursuing immortality for the future human race if we know that we won’t be a part of that immortality. This story symbolizes the ambiguity many current people may feel at the idea that we may be working toward an immortality we can never personally hope to experience. As Herrick says, this focus on our future destiny makes present concerns and humans irrelevant.

One of the possibilities is the idea that all humans could coalesce into one collective mind, which could help in our survival. This is shown in “Gravity Mine,” where humanity

35 Midgley, Science asSalvation, 222.
37 Herrick, Scientific Mythologies, 137.
lives on in a collective conscious after the galaxy implodes. However, this story questions whether this collective conscious is good, since individuality is lost. One of the minds separates and goes off on its own, where it is free to be fully individually conscious.  

There is also a desire to be free of physical limitations, of having new bodies. “Call Me Joe” described a handicapped human being who decided to take a new body in a creature that was created to live on Mars. Thus there was the promise for escaping disabilities – and also for people close to death to have second lives (or more) in new bodies. This could be seen as a new form of the Christian promise of new bodies in heaven. We long to be free of the illnesses and problems that come with our current bodies. These science fiction stories offer some hope that technology will someday be able to provide the key to immortal bodies. And unlike traditional Christianity, it also promises that we will be the ones in control, deciding how and what our new bodies will be.

This is the great hope of postmodern science fiction, to achieve both salvation and control. It may be hypothesized that postmoderns would be more negative toward science and technology since they question the modern emphasis on knowledge. However, as Brent Waters discusses, they actually have a great affinity toward technology as a tool for remaking reality, which is subjective. Since reality is not objective, but is determined by us, technology can help us remake it however we’d like. This gives us power and control over our own destinies, to fix our own problems and provide our own salvation.

---

40 Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).
Oddly enough, despite these great promises of power and control, there is a dark side to science fiction, especially the most recent science fiction. There is an underlying dread in science fiction that the future of technology may not be as positive as we hope. This fear will be explored in the next section.

**The Threats of Technology**

Despite the strong religious ideas surrounding the future of technology in science fiction, this is accompanied by a fear or skepticism about it as well. Among the stories examined for this paper, nearly an equal number of stories were negative toward technology as were positive. This is puzzling, if one considers that science fiction is often written by people from a scientific background and for a culture to a large degree enamored with technology.

Scholars commenting on science fiction posit a number of explanations for the negative portrayal of technology in science fiction. One possible reason could be a pragmatic one. Danger and fear are more dramatic and memorable than a future that is completely positive. According to Edward James, in fiction, utopia is boring.⁴¹ There is no dramatic tension in a perfect world. Gwyneth Jones notes that aliens in movies are more threatening than those in books, because aliens destroying the earth sell more tickets than ones coming to save it.⁴² Thus writers may purposefully add dangerous technology as a way to add drama and suspense.

Ryan and Kellner give a different explanation for the negative portrayal of technology in some science fiction. They say that this negative view of technology comes from a conservative perspective, one that is afraid of the changing world and its implications for

---

⁴¹ Edward James, “Utopias and Anti-utopias,” in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*.
⁴² Jones, “Icons of Science Fiction,” 168.
morality. The authors argue from a postmodern perspective that what we see as natural is actually socially constructed and thus a form of technology. They say conservatives find modern liberal ideas threatening and equate them with technology, which then is portrayed as evil in their movies. This conservative agenda could be convincingly argued for a few movies. However, it is inadequate for the vast amounts of science fiction that are negative toward technology, especially given that most of the authors and moviemakers are more liberal themselves and not likely to have a conservative bias.

A better explanation could be found in looking at science fiction’s role. Edward James says that science fiction looks at the problems with utopia. John Clute says that “healthy science fiction should be utopian, pushing for change.” Part of this role is to point out what is wrong and what should be better. The apocalyptic portrayals of the future is thus in part a representation of what is seen as wrong now, and what could be problems in the direction we’re headed.

Although this is a good explanation, it still overlooks what lies at the heart of science fiction as literature. Although literature can be used didactically to promote certain ideas or an agenda, this is not its entire role (nor its best one). Rather, it shows our deepest fears and emotions as humans. It can pull out what is hidden. Although science fiction authors and our society may hold glowing hopes about what technology can do for us, there is still a deep sense of unease about our future with technology. In non-fiction, these emotions may not be as likely to emerge. Fiction, on the other hand, must connect in a deep way to human’s deepest emotions, and thus it cannot ignore the doubts that might be lurking there. As Tom

---

44 James, “Utopias and Anti-utopias,” 221.
45 Clute, “Science Fiction from 1980 to the Present,” 75.
Shippey says, it is searching for the answers to deep questions, including humanity’s place in this new world.46 In his book Technophobia, Dinello focuses on science fiction’s fear of technology. He says that science fiction’s role is to “dramatize our fears.”47

Science fiction in general has a sense of foreboding about the world, particularly technology and the future it might bring us. This is most true in recent science fiction that looks at the problems with genetic technology, virtual reality and the ideas of digitization. Stableford says that more recent science fiction has turned toward pessimism rather than triumphalism.48 Although there are many hopes placed in the latest forms of technology, there is also fear of where it might lead, especially for the future of humanity.

There are numerous science fiction stories about technology getting out of control and wreaking havoc. This is especially true in recent stories about nanotechnology and supercomputers. In “Steve Fever,” nanomachines get out of control and kidnap people in their attempt to complete their mission.49 This is an example of technology as a virus, spreading and duplicating itself dangerously.50

Supercomputers particularly are shown as potentially ruthless and dictatorial. In “The Voluntary State,” a supercomputer acts as ruler of a society after a singularity. It controls everything, including plants, animals, and human minds, until defeated by a rebel force from outside.51 In “Answer,” a supercomputer is created and asked the ultimate question, “Is there a

---

46 Shippey, Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories, xi.
50 Dinello, Technophobia, 132.
51 Christopher Rowe, “The Voluntary State,” in The Year's Best Science Fiction: Twenty-second Annual Collection.
god?” It replies, “Now there is,” and kills the person who tries to turn it off.\textsuperscript{52} In each of these stories, the dark side of a future of a world run by supercomputers is shown. Dinello talks about how science fiction shows humans as prisoners of technology.\textsuperscript{53} These stories again all show a fear that technology may not deliver the control it promises and may instead take the last of our humanity away from us.

As was noted earlier, the idea of digital replication is seen as providing the promise of living forever. But in “Lighting Out,” the negative side of digitization is shown. Digital copies are made of humans, which are then regularly destroyed so the copies don’t get out of control. But these copies end up rebelling. In the end, the hero and heroine escape to a planet which is removed from this. There is a sense of a natural world being a refuge from the problem created by the digitized technical worlds.\textsuperscript{54}

Digitization also poses a threat to our individuality and control, which is shown in “Pretty Boy Crossover.”\textsuperscript{55} In this story a good looking young man is encouraged to become data which can be projected around the world and admired. Although there are benefits – including fame and immortality, the boy refuses, because that is the one form of control he can hold onto. This is indicative of the lack of control many people are feeling in our modern world. Although technology promises humanity greater control over their bodies and their futures, in practice, often control is taken away by technology and those who control it.

A world filled with virtual reality is shown from an artist’s perspective in “Nevermore.”\textsuperscript{56} An artist is living in a world that has gone to virtual reality. He chooses

\textsuperscript{52} Fredric Brown, “Answer,” http://www.alteich.com/oldsite/answer.htm
\textsuperscript{53} Dinello, Technophobia, 176.
\textsuperscript{54} Ken MacLeod, “Lighting Out,” in The Year's Best Science Fiction: Twenty-fifth Annual Collection.
\textsuperscript{55} Pat Cadigan, “Pretty Boy Crossover,” in Beyond Flesh.
\textsuperscript{56} Ken MacLeod, “Nevermore,” in Beyond Flesh.
instead to live in the dreary, run-down parts of the world that haven’t been put under virtual reality, and he refuses to be digitized, even though he’s nearing death. There is a sense that a true artist will cling to the real and genuine, even if it means suffering and death. There is a recognition of what may be lost in a virtual world – along with a sense of reality, a sense of depth and meaningfulness could be lost. A virtual world that we create could have many benefits of ease and comfort, but perhaps something of substance and meaning could be lost if we lose touch with a real physical world.

In addition to technology being shown as dangerous, human beings themselves are seen as threats to future utopia. One of the problems with putting our hope in future technology is that it involves humans, which have historically had a tendency to mess things up. This is shown in “Second Dawn,” about a race of telepathic creatures which discovers the ability to do technology. They hope this technology will save them from the destructive wars they’ve engaged in, but in the end, they realize there is still that possibility; warfare comes from them and can even be aided by technology.57 This pessimism about humanity may be a recognition of an idea of man’s fallenness. The promises of science fiction that we can control our salvation is limited by that fact that we are defective, and could prove unreliable for effectively engineering that salvation.

In addition to fallen humanity, nature also is shown as standing in the way of future utopia. Part of the goal of technology is to control nature. However, science fiction often displays a sense of helplessness in the face of a nature that is unfriendly and cannot be tamed. As Tom Shippey says, despite the seeming greater control we’re gaining through technology, science fiction is “aware of the immense scale of Nature, against which human beings are set

and against which they are ultimately powerless.” Early science fiction stories show this more prominently. In “Finis” light from a powerful new star reaches the earth and kills everything on it, while people helplessly try to survive. There is thus a recognition of the fallenness of all of creation, and that it will be standing in the way of any hopes to creating heaven on earth by ourselves.

Nearly all science fiction has a sense of fatalism in the face of nature and the universe. As the Cambridge book says, “The alienation at the heart of sf is most evident in the sense of the uncaring universe.” Even with all that science is expected to accomplish, there is still a sense that it may prove too little to conquer nature. In “Night,” a man travels ahead in time to when the earth has frozen. Some technology has survived but it will soon cease to work when energy runs out. Although some science fiction presents hope that we can conquer entropy and keep the universe running forever, there are some stories that recognize the futility of that endeavor. Despite our best efforts, the universe will eventually die. “Against the Current” also shows unusual fate ultimately leading to the death of the hero.

Thus, along with the grand hopes for technology in the future, science fiction also presents the sobering reality that many things stand against such a possibility. Technology can go wrong and create a dystopia instead of a utopia. Humans and their problems will still be fallible and can cause problems with new technology. And nature and fate also can stand opposed to all the best efforts of man and can defeat even our technology. Science fiction stories create grand dream of what we want to be and accomplish, but that dream cannot stand

up to reality. Mary Midgley says that “the discrepancy between image and fact is growing too wide to be tolerated.”\textsuperscript{63} We must become more realistic about what we can hope to accomplish. Technology cannot provide us the salvation we long for.

\textbf{Conclusion}

“A Case of Consilience” is unique among the science fiction stories studied in that it conveys a positive view of traditional Christianity. In the story, a missionary is trying to witness to an alien species. The scientists dislike him and his cause, and one of them betrays the missionary and pushes him into the swamp where he dies. The aliens, which are a form of plant life, digest him and in so doing learn everything that he knew. They are fascinated by the “good news” they discover from him of the gospel. They have been uninterested in the scientific knowledge the scientists are trying to communicate to them, because they are far more advanced. But this is something outside of science that captivates them, and many of them accept the good news.\textsuperscript{64}

Interestingly, the author of this story is an atheist. But he had enough of an understanding of Christianity, and a willingness to enter into it, to portray a much more positive view of religion. Indeed, one of the messages of the story seems to be that there is some value to Christianity and religious belief that cannot be supplied by science. The scientists in the story think there is nothing of value in what the missionary is saying, but the alien creatures, who are portrayed as much wiser, do see a value in something that is not scientific. This goes against the prevailing world view of science and science fiction, which says that the only truth is to be found in science, and there is nothing outside the physical

\textsuperscript{63} Midgley, \textit{Science as Salvation}, 224.
\textsuperscript{64} Ken MacLeod, “A Case of Consilience,” in \textit{The Year's Best Science Fiction: Twenty-third Annual Collection}. 

20
world. But from a Christian perspective, although science and technology have value, but do
not hold the answer to everything. Even with the scientific advances that are being made, we
still need something outside of the physical world to provide meaning, significance and
salvation.

Such a perspective could provide balance to the world of science fiction, and provide
an antidote to the two extremes in attitudes it has toward technology. On the one hand,
science fiction has grand hopes of a future where technology can solve all of our problems,
give us complete power, and provide a form of salvation. On the other extreme, science
fiction is very dark and pessimistic about human kind’s future. It recognizes that there is the
possibility of things going very wrong, and that humanity, nature and technology itself seem
to tend toward problems.

A Christian world view would say that technology has value, and should be used to
counter some of the negative effects of this world. However technology cannot solve all of
our problems and give us meaning and hope. Our final salvation will therefore not come from
technology, but that failure will not mean ultimate defeat. There can still be hope in salvation
from a non-technological source, who exists outside of our physical universe.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


