Chapter 1

Technology and Religion

“God is the second most sought after reality on the Internet.”
Richard Jensen

“On a daily basis, more people use the Internet for spiritual purposes than for gambling, banking, finding a date, trading stocks, or buying and selling.”
The Pew Internet & American Life Project

1.1 Introduction

This text examines technology and religion. We start by pausing to define technology. We find that the superficial definitions describe examples of technology. The deeper definitions seek to identify its nature and essence. Overall, technology is to be distinguished from science. Unlike science, technology is applied to daily life. Science seeks knowledge as an end in itself. Science can be considered to be “neutral,” without any moral or ethical bias, while technology can never be neutral because it is applied. In technology, there are questions of what applications are made and what is done with the technological product.
We also consider why we are making a focus on technology, and not science. There is a long history of debate between science and religion, but not much has been said about technology and religion. The earliest reference to trades and crafts were the ancestors of technology. This sort of technology was dismissed by Christianity. This type of "technology" was found to be irrelevant to Christianity’s ultimate concerns: those of salvation and resurrection. The indifference turned to an antagonism between science and religion. The disharmony peaked with the persecutions that were made against scientists by the church. The relationship turned to debate, and then each discipline went its separate ways. Some found common ground, but largely the controversy subsided. Many see science and religion as having common aims and motivations. Instead, it is technology that has risen to be the crucial point of contact with religion and secular society.

We move on to define what is meant by religion, also finding that this is not an easy topic to define. Definitions of religion may be broad enough to encompass anything that is ritualistic and social, or too narrow in that things we would naturally label religion are not captured. We may take various approaches to religion: seeing it as a social construction and as wish fulfillment, as alienation and a “human construction” that is defiance in the face of God. Definitions of religion may also offend sensibilities, suggesting that religion is the epitome of human idolatry, inhibiting God’s self-revelation and undermining all that Christendom has “constructed” in church, society, theology, and doctrine. We find “virtual religion” is as hard to define, being essentially religion that is finding electronic expression. To that extent, it may simply repeat and copy conventional religion into the virtual world, or it may be “different.”

Finally, we consider in more depth some of the issues that will be of interest in the nexus of religion and technology. We emphasise that it is the synergy of the two fields that is the most important aspect in this text: how each furthers the aims of the other; how the philosophy of technology is informed by the nexus as technology facilitates a spiritual quest, as technology reveals what it is to be human, and as technology is influenced by humanity, and not vice versa.

The objective of this chapter is to introduce and define the basic terms religion and technology. We also aim to motivate why the
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