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Secularizing Demons

Fundamentalist Navigations in Religion and Secularity

The outcome of humanity's Fall from Eden, English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon wrote in *The New Organon*, 'did not make the creation an utter and irrevocable outlaw.' This 'not' marks a site of possibility. Bacon held that prelapsarian perfection would only be regained at world's end; however, parts of it could be regained in earthly life. These came in two main types: innocence, which might be healed by God's grace through religion and faith, and dominion, which could be repaired by human arts and sciences as 'man, by manifold labours... compels the creation, in time and in part... to serve the purposes of human life' (2000, 221). It was this Baconian idea of dominion, Peter Harrison claims, which informed the birth of modern science as the 'struggle to recover, through effort and industry in the present life, capacities that were once part of the natural endowment of human beings' (2007, 158). Although rooted in Christian scriptures, however, this struggle led to complications: modern science found its relationship to the Fall narrative that prompted it increasingly strained, and eventually unsustainable: the 'uneasy relationship between the rational principle of design and the more fragile historical concept of the Fall was resolved in favour of the former' (*ibid.*, 247). This resolution was echoed in other spheres like politics and law, which also shed the overt theology of their origins, secularisation becoming coded as emancipation. Yet this epistemic metamorphosis also permitted other narratives. In one, the tensions are seen as resolved in favour of the latter: that is, science's desertion of scriptural foundations was not a flight towards but from truth, not the abandonment but the triumph of the Fall—the moment that God's creation became, or began to become, 'an utter and irrevocable outlaw.'

This article explores an exemplar of this latter narrative in the works of a network of post-denominational evangelical bioconservatives in the contemporary United States.¹ Fundamentalist in orientation, and situated at the nexus of far-right US politics, conspiracist subcultures, and neo-charismatic paradigms of spiritual warfare, this milieu's members construct complex apocalyptic demonologies of secular society that recast secularisation as a demonic co-option of divine order. These demonologies centre on the construction of the 'Religion of Man' (RoM)—a trans-historical and satanically inspired ideology of human (self-)apotheosis that opposes (and potentially disrupts) God's plan. In this article I deconstruct RoM, unpacking its figuration of broader Western cultural tensions between religion and secularity. First, I outline the features and figures of the milieu, and the conceptuality underlying RoM, proceeding then to analyse two core conceptual features of RoM—human artifice and (self-)transformation—as present in demonisations of three cultural discourses: Darwinian evolution, New Age spirituality, and revolutionary politics. In the milieu's works, these demonisations constitute parts of a general demonology of becoming tied to the ideological projects of secular modernity, and are constructed as converging in an apocalyptic figuration of transhumanist philosophy and emerging technoscience.

While it foregrounds the dangers of radical enhancement, this demonology of becoming is foremost a demonology of history—an attempt to rationalise the rise of secularism and the marginalisation of public religion. The final section thus situates the milieu's apocalyptic 'transhumanism' in relation to debates around religion and secularity, exploring how secularism's genealogical ties to Christianity condition and complicate its demonologies. Ultimately, I argue these demonologies are attempts to navigate cultural tensions between religion and secularity and to negotiate the place of religion in a world where secular discourses like transhumanism reinscribe originally-religious concepts in secularised terms and present emerging technoscientific paths to their attainment. If, as R. Scott Appleby argues, fundamentalists are at root 'reactive and selective', and they react (in part, if not in whole) to the perceived marginalisation of (their religion (2011, 230), then the demonologies analysed represent reactions not just to perceptions of marginalisation but perhaps also to obsolescence.

ANATOMY OF A MILIEU

The relationship between transhumanism and more traditional religious systems has increasingly become a topic of academic study (see, for example, Cole-Turner 2011; Deane-Drummond, Bergman, and Szersynski 2015; Mercer and Trothen 2015). Furthermore, critical analyses of the political, philosophical, and narrative structures of conspiracist theories and subcultures has risen as such discourses have migrated towards the US mainstream (Barkun 2013), and there has also been a re-evaluation of the socio-political negotiations operating in Christian demonologies in contemporary America (McCloud 2015). Individuals and groups at the confluence of these currents have not yet been sufficiently explored. Given the socio-political prominence to which contentions over evolutionary theory or anthropogenic climate change have risen in contemporary America, I believe it is time for closer analysis of those operating in this nexus of conservative politics, evangelical religiosity and conspiracist subcultures, exploring both their relation to broader movements and their potentially illuminating specificities.

This section introduces and analyses the texts of one group—a loose network of post-denominational evangelical bioconservatives in the USA. Although fringe, as James Hughes explores groups like this one tap into wider concerns about emerging technology held by both the Christian Right and secular bioconservatives (2012, 770). Moreover, the specificities of the group's works also exemplify contemporary cultural contestations around the relationship of religion and secularity. Despite (or because) of their reactionary and selective character, their demonologies place transhumanist and fundamentalist eschatologies in interrelation, illustrating their interdependence as entangled accentuations of genealogical tensions arising from secularism's emergence from and appropriation of Christian theological concepts. Interrogation of this group thus facilitates both analysis of bioconservative concerns over emerging technology and enables the situating of such concerns within broader conversations about religion and secularity in the contemporary West. These are themes I develop in depth below.

Figures, Features, Fundamentals

The individuals in this group are not formally affiliated, but rather coalesce around certain online and offline platforms and write on shared themes and concerns (biblical prophecy, transhumanism, ufology, New Age spirituality, alternative history, conspiracy theory, and emerging technoscience broadly). Formerly congregating on the now-defunct Raiders News Network (raidersnewsupdate.com), run by evangelical survivalist Thomas Horn, their primary hubs at present are SkyWatchTV (skywatchtv.com), coordinated by

Derek Gilbert, and Prophecy in the News (prophecyinthenews.com), founded by Baptist minister J. R. Church. The group's print works are mostly published through Horn's independent publishing house, Defender, and since 2012 they have coordinated an annual 1000-ticket event, the Pike's Peak Prophecy Summit, at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Because of their shared platforms and themes but lack of strict formal organisational affiliation, I elect to refer to this group as a milieu.²

Horn is a pivotal figure in this milieu. Styling himself as one of the most (if not *the* most) publically-recognized [*sic*] Christian critics of transhumanism with a belief in prophecy' (2011, 3), Horn is the author or co-author of multiple books, prefaces, and introductions, editor of three essay collections, and features in several documentary-style DVDs on transhumanism viewed through his idiosyncratic demonology, which maintains that emerging technoscience will be used to create demonic angel-human-animal-plant hybrids, or Nephilim' (Horn 2013, 194). While such oddities might cast Horn as marginal, he has been featured heavily on popular right-wing conspiracist website WorldNetDaily (wnd.com), and has close ties to other parts of the Christian Right through his ally Chuck Missler, serving as faculty at Missler's Koinonia Institute, a non-denominational but decidedly fundamental' religious school aimed at training and equipping the serious Christian to sojourn in today's world' (Koinonia Institute 2015, 3, 7).

Like many fundamentalists, Horn's milieu exhibits the dual tendency towards a belief in the Bible's inerrancy and divine inspiration and a (sometimes contrary) commitment to demonstrate that inerrancy empirically by comparison with historical and contemporary evidences (Harris 2008, 15). This tendency, Matthew Avery Sutton notes, was influenced by the Baconian unity of faith and science. It treated the Bible like a series of propositions that when properly arranged and classified unveiled the plan of the ages,' which is mapped onto and supplemented by material reality (2014, 15–16). This interplay of text and context is present throughout the milieu's works, but it is also conditioned by another more specific hermeneutics. Both Missler and Horn, and the other members of the milieu, are part of the broader current of Third Wave' spiritual warfare, a neo-charismatic paradigm with dominionist influences that emerged in the 1980s and has become influential across the spectrum of conservative evangelicalism in the USA (see Holvast 2009; Warren 2012). Drawing on the biblical image of the holy warrior, this paradigm constructs a worldview in which the spiritual (heavenly) and material (earthly) worlds act as intertwined battlefields in a cosmic struggle for the human

soul waged against Satan, who has amassed an army of evil spirits that he is using to attack and demonize humans in an effort to win their souls for hell' (McCloud 2013, 170). Analysing spiritual warfare discourses in the US, Sean McCloud argues that spiritual warriors use an supernatural hermeneutic

materialist hermeneutics of suspicion by identifying not economics or psychology as the bases of existence but the conflicts of unseen (angelic and demonic) entities, for which the struggles and exigencies of everyday life are mere superstructures (McCloud 2015, 62, 115).

A clear example of this hermeneutics can be discerned in Horn's discussion of the causes and ends of radical enhancement. In his *Zenith 2016* (2013, 261–70), Horn discusses the Heaven' and Hell' scenarios of human enhancement, drawing on Joel Garreau's *Radical Evolution* (2005) and Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* (2002). Characterising Garreau's utopic Heaven' scenario as naïve and delusional, Horn then outlines a number of hellish outcomes shared by more secular or less apocalyptically-minded bioconservatives—that it will magnify inequality or produce full-scale race wars' between enhanced and unenhanced humans, or simply unleash death on a scale heretofore unfathomable (see Agar 2010). Horn then exposes the foundations of his hermeneutic by remarking that the spirit behind the transhumanist nightmare will put the hell in hell scenario sooner than most comprehend' (Horn 2013, 270). For Horn and others in his milieu, this hell scenario is not merely *a* or even *the* logical outcome of enhancement but an outcome that has been orchestrated by a spiritual hand.

War of the Worldviews

For the milieu, this outcome has been a long-time coming, and the secularisation of science, and Western society broadly, is central to its actualisation. In a lengthy 2006 blog post, for example, Philip Collins sketches the following interpretation of history to explain religious resemblances in secular ideologies:

Historically, humanity has divided somewhat evenly into two diametrically opposed camps: those who subscribe to a spiritual, theistic Weltanschauung and those who do not... [T]he anti-theistic and anti-spiritual Weltanschauung adamantly opposes most, if not all, religions. However, most contemporary movements that have ostensibly eschewed a spiritual outlook have sociologically behaved like religions... How does one explain this paradox? It is this researcher's contention that the anti-theistic and anti-spiritual Weltanschauung was spawned by an older religion. This

religion is purely occult in character and... remains deeply embedded within the ostensibly secular mind (2006).

Collins is no longer in Horn's immediate circle, although he and his brother, Paul, were once both 'regular contributors' to Horn's Raiders News Network (MAD, Collins, and Collins 2014). However, the scenario outlined above reflects the milieu's core beliefs: history is seen as a site of dualistic struggle between incommensurable forces, one theistic and spiritual—and thus godly—the other atheistic and material—and thus satanic (see Hamp 2011a; Horn 2013; McGuire and Anderson 2015; Quayle 2014). Modern secularism is figured as a variant of the latter. Perhaps unexpectedly, Collins identifies traces of 'religion' in these secularised paradigms, resolving this conundrum by identifying secularism as a form of *a* religion: an older, 'purely occult' system from which modern secularism emerges.

Collins (2006) identifies the occult religion he views as the heart of secularism as the 'religion of man' (hereafter, RoM), a term that is also deployed by fellow anti-transhumanist evangelical Carl Teichrib (2011, 299). While this specific term is not always deployed—Horn, for example, uses 'Promethean faith' (2013, 69), and Sharon Gilbert speaks of the 'Dragon's dream' (2011, 357)—RoM encapsulates a number of features evoked by the milieu, serving as shorthand for an anthropocentric rather than theocentric worldview that aims to improve human life not through reliance upon the divine but the work of human hands. RoM echoes a Baconian notion of dominion—in which humanity 'compels' creation 'to serve the purposes of human life'—but shorn of Christian trappings. The secularisation of modern Western science is seen as a core element of RoM. In *The Rise of the Scientific Dictatorship* (2004), for example, the Collins brothers frame RoM as central to a transhistorical 'conspiracy of knowledge,' one waging a war of ideas by corrupting science—'initially a God-given instrument for the broadening of human understanding'—in order to fulfil 'the recreation of man in the image of their god' (2004, 2). For the milieu, the 'god' alluded to here is Satan, viewed as an entity that (under many names) has orchestrated diverse systems of thought in religio-political contexts ranging from ancient Sumer to the Global War on Terror (Horn 2013, 29–40, 161–5).

The tenets of RoM are seen by the milieu as the heart of Satan's multifarious systems, which in the present include current and emerging science and technologies, secular humanisms, and contemporary spiritualities. Beyond secularising science, key historic elements of RoM include the revolutionary political ideologies of Europe

(notably France) and America. While these phenomena might seem disparate, in their construction by the milieu they share both a common feature—an idea of progress, evolution, or transformation—and a common source—Satan. Analysed in the context of the milieu’s demonologies, what emerges is a general *demonology of becoming*, a conceptual framework in which becoming-other (from an original, God-given state of being) is seen as becoming-demonic.³ It is to this demonology that I now turn.

DIABOLICAL (R)EVOLUTIONS

In the works of the milieu, RoM has two main qualities, both of which are tied to the narrative of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9, in which a united human effort to build a tower to heaven brings divine judgement and forced diaspora (Horn 2013; McGuire and Anderson 2015; Teichrib 2011). These qualities are (1) a championing of human artifice over divine nature, and (2) a focus on ideas of ‘becoming’, particularly ‘becoming divine’ or ‘becoming God.’ Transhumanism is figured as a modern repetition of this narrative: as Jim Fletcher writes in his foreword to Horn’s *Pandemonium’s Engine*, transhumanists are ‘builders of the New Babel’ (2011, xi). To understand how the milieu’s ‘transhumanism’ discursively functions, however, it is necessary to examine the ideological bricks from which New Babel is constructed. In this section I examine three: New Age spiritualities, Darwinian evolution, and revolutionary politics. Milieu members explore each extensively, but unevenly, depending on their fixations. Rather than examining each in depth, I focus on their interwoven placement in the milieu’s demonology of becoming. All are multifaceted and complex discourses, and my treatment of them should be seen as analysing them in their variegated exigencies but solely in terms of their construction by Horn’s milieu, in which they are emblematic of a diabolic attempt to co-opt creation. In this section, I explore the milieu’s own construction of this co-option, one tied to secular modernity and ending with transhumanism. Later, I deconstruct this construction in relation to critiques of secularism and its genealogical relation to Christian theology.

The Fall as Evolutionary Impetus

The foundational attribute of RoM is its championing of human artifice over divine nature. This leads to an emphasis on materiality and construction. Noting that Babel was

‘representative of Man’s power via a unified objective,’ Teichrib continues that ‘False religion—the abandonment of the true Yahweh for an alternative—is frequently accompanied by a tangible *edifice* or *system*’ (2011: 301). Horn associates demons with a manipulation of biological matter (2013, 201–2), and Paul McGuire and Troy Anderson (2015) and Jonathan Cahn (2014) believe the modern skyscraper’s surpassing of the height of Christian cathedrals was a key moment in the transition from a divine to a demonic world order. More important than the edifice itself, however, is the purpose for which it is built. For the milieu, the goal of Babel is humanapotheosis.

The act of building thus blurs into the second quality: an act of becoming (God) which is opposed to ‘being,’ and specifically to ‘being-in-place’ in accordance with divine fiat. Supplementing Babel, the milieu also draws here on the tale of the Watchers from Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch, in which the angelic Watchers desert their place in heaven and interbreed with human women to produce hybrid children. Horn writes that ‘[d]eparting the proper habitation that God had assigned them was grievous to the Lord and led to divine penalization’—here, Noah’s Deluge (Horn 2013, 195). As well as rebuilding Babel, emerging technoscience (especially genetic engineering) is seen as recreating the transgression of the Watchers—creating hybrid beings by crossing ontological and species boundaries in contravention of divine law—a repetition of act that will lead to a repetition of sentence (see, Gilbert 2011; Hamp 2011a; Horn 2011; McGuire and Anderson 2015). This destabilisation of essential ontology tied to inevitable teleology is central to the milieu’s demonisations of evolutionary paradigms, which include both New Age spirituality and Darwinism.

Both Babel and Watcher narratives can be construed as modalities of the Fall. Lambasting New Age and neo-Pagan notions of inner, personal divinity as attempts to recreate Babel by uniting all peoples under one faith, Horn writes: ‘Pagans argue [that a] principle of inner divinity is older than Christianity, which is true. The gospel according to such New Age concepts—a gospel of —becoming God —is as old as the fall of man. It began when the serpent said to the woman —ye shall be as gods (KJV), Genesis 3:5 and it will zenith during the reign of the anti-Christian god-king’ (2013, 93). The Collins brothers explicitly link this spirituality to Darwinian evolution, writing that the ‘occult concept of —becoming, — disseminated to the populace as —Darwinism. Evolution is the means by which this purported transformation of man into God is to occur’ (2004, 6). Claims that Darwinism is an exoteric form of an occult doctrine might seem strange, but the milieu is reacting to a specific genealogy. Evolutionary ideas were highly influential in

the development of the nineteenth-century occulture from which the forebears of New Age spirituality arose, notably the Theosophical Society, which repudiated ‘exoteric’ Darwinian evolution but formed its own schema based on ideas of the spiritual evolution of the cosmos. Furthermore, as Per Faxneld explores, while Theosophy’s core texts rejected ideas of Satan as a really-existing entity, they saw the Fall as a positive event that set evolution in motion by ‘breaking free from stasis, disrupting equilibrium by eating the forbidden fruit’ (2012, 216).

The milieu counter-subverts this subversion, (re)integrating its principles into their apocalyptic narrative. Tying exoteric and esoteric strands into a demonological transhumanism, the milieu conflates ideas of evolutionary development to the notion that humanity should (therefore) guide its own evolution. Two members of the milieu, John McTernan and Douglas Hamp, articulate this explicitly. McTernan laments that evolutionary theory ‘detaches man from his Creator and being created in God’s image and likeness... Man is now a free agent to tamper with his DNA under the guise of advancing evolution’ (2011, 268), while Hamp claims that teaching evolution removes God, and, ‘With God removed, we can understand how mixing two different kinds of animals in order to –evolve to a new level raises very few flags... After all, they say we *came* from animals’ (2011b, 238). Sharon Gilbert, a close ally of Horn’s channels this association by way of Mary Shelley’s gothic novel, *Frankenstein*. In an extensive email reproduced by Horn she writes, ‘Like Shelley’s *Modern Prometheus*, Victor Frankenstein, today’s molecular magicians play –god not by stitching together rotting corpses, but by reforming the very essence of our beings: our DNA’ (in Horn 2013, 278). Gilbert elaborates elsewhere that *Frankenstein* ‘embodied the ancient desires of fallen angels to eliminate man’s innate DNA and replace it with [another]’—this corruption is ‘the Dragon’s dream’ which ‘sleeps within the dark thoughts of many scientists and New Age believers today’ (2011, 357).

Lucifer as Revolutionary Archetype

By fulfilling this draconic dream, transhumanism will create ‘eschatological tools of transformation’ that threaten ‘to rewrite the laws of nature and permanently alter the course of life’ (Horn 2011, 5, 34). However, before this endgame could be realised, RoM also had to transform the fabric of society. In the minds of milieu members, the tenets of RoM do not merely reside in the realm of personal, inner transformation but also in the ideologies and practices of revolution. However, here revolution is closely linked to the

ascendency of secular science. Drawing on James Billington's 1980 *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith*, Horn refers to RoM as the 'Promethean faith' (Horn 2013, 69), the idea 'that science would lead men out of darkness into light' accompanied by a 'millennial assumption that, on the new day that was dawning, the sun would never set' (Billington 1999, 6).

The milieu sees this faith as working behind various political projects, most notably the post-independence United States (Collins and Collins 2004, 119–21; Horn 2013, 59–73, 104–121), but also communism and fascism (Collins and Collins 2004, 57–60). The Collins brothers link it to their transhistorical conspiracy, noting that this 'faith, which has underpinned a majority of contemporary crusades to establish a socialist totalitarian one world government, revered science as the ultimate source of truth.' Moreover, with time's passage, 'Scientific terminology supplanted the overtly mystical vernacular of the elite's occult doctrines and became the chief facilitator of humanity's deification' (2004, 10). This transition establishes a further element of mutability to RoM that contrasts the milieu's belief in Biblical inerrancy. Eschewing a stability of text and truth, RoM shifts with the times, scientific language replacing 'occult doctrines' according to utility.

Much like evolution is linked to the Fall, this revolutionary faith is also given an ancient pedigree. Horn remarks early in one work that the light towards which this revolutionary faith leads us 'is derived from Lucifer, the light-bearer' (2013, 40), and argues that the origin of human ego unbound from divine order began 'in the distant past, when a "fire in the minds of angels" caused Lucifer to exalt himself above God's creation' (Horn 2013, 84). This claim ties ideas of revolutionary politics to Lucifer's failed rebellion, and implies a correlation between God and the *ancien régime*. This association is not fully coincidental or idiosyncratic. As demonisations of Darwinism and New Age drew from select genealogies, demonisations of revolution draw on others, notably that of 'Romantic' or 'symbolic' Satanism. Exhibited centrally in Romantic and Decadent literature and influenced by Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, these discourses recast the fallen angel from architect of evil into an 'image of expanding human consciousness and desire, rebelling against oppression and limitation' (Schock 2003, 39).

This paradigm was not widespread, but was taken up by several occultural and political milieu, from Theosophy to socialism and women's liberation (Faxneld 2012, 2013). For the milieu, however, the most relevant form of symbolic Satanism is its usage (occasional and ironic) by atheist humanists and transhumanists. One example, cited by

Horn as exemplary of transhumanist attitudes to Christianity (2011, 63–5), is a 1991 op-ed by transhumanist philosopher Max More in his magazine *Extropy*. Titled ‘In Praise of the Devil,’ the article calls Lucifer ‘the embodiment of reason, of intelligence, of critical thought. He stands against the dogma of God and all other dogmas. He stands for the exploration of new ideas.’ He concludes the piece with an exhortation to ‘Join me, join Lucifer, and join *Extropy* in fighting God and his entropic forces with our minds, our wills and our courage. God’s army is strong, but they are backed by ignorance, fear and cowardice. Reality is fundamentally on our side. Forward into the light!’ (1991, 1–2). More’s plaudit encapsulates the principle features of symbolic Satanism—Satan’s alignment with reality, reason, light, and novelty, against a divine order characterised by fear, ignorance, and unquestioned and unquestionable archaic dogma. Integrating More’s remarks into their demonologies, Horn’s milieu tie transhumanism into both an ancient conflict and a recent history of political and scientific emancipation from religious doctrine: that is, to secularisation.

Diabolising History, Diabolising Humanity

Through selective appropriation of these genealogies, the milieu constructs a model of history split between divine order and demonic deviation. In reality, Western occulture, Darwinian evolutionary theory, and revolutionary ideology are multiform phenomena with complex and disparate, if occasionally intertwining, genealogies. In this brief overview I have not aimed to do them justice but rather to present them as they are utilised in the works of the milieu as parts of a shared whole with a shared source: Satan. More specifically, Satan’s wilful rejection of a divine order either in his lighting of a ‘fire in the minds of angels’ or later in the mind of Eve. The Fall acts as a critical event for these currents, marking the forward thrust of time and the origins of RoM in the serpent’s promise of human apotheosis. The Babel and Watcher narratives buttress this original promise, acting as failed attempts to fulfil it either via a united human effort to reach heaven or by direct demonic intervention in the essential (genetic) make-up of the human.

While both are integrated into a narrative of (demon-inspired) human attempts at apotheosis, however, the Babel and Watcher narratives are not fully comparable. One leads to forced diaspora and the other to annihilation, one to an elimination of means (language is diversified, people scattered) and the other to an elimination of existence (all life is ended). This difference plays into the milieu’s demonology of transhumanism. As

skyscrapers surpassing cathedrals marked a transition of worldly order from godly to demonic, the transhumanist desire and technological means to undo not just worldly order but the ‘essence’ of the human is seen as threatening to irrevocably transform creation. Like the Watcher narrative, this transhuman endgame has a biological element, and Gilbert’s positing of DNA as ‘the very essence of our being,’ for example, establishes a biological essence to the human. Horn ties this into apocalyptic soteriology, arguing that the Mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:16–17) could be a result of genetic tampering that, by introducing non-human animal DNA into the human genome, would make the bearer actually ‘part –beast’ ‖He continues that since these individuals would no longer be ‘entirely human’ ‖the individual could no longer be ‘–saved’ ‖or go to heaven’ (2013, 277).

It is possible to consider this demonological transhumanism simply a hyper-religious and imaginative form of bioconservatism broadly, summarised by Thomas Douglas as the view that even ‘if it were technically possible and legally permissible for people to engage in biomedical enhancement, it would not be *morally permissible* for them to do so’ (2013, 236). Horn, Gilbert, Teichrib, and others might articulate their views in a language of soteriology, eschatology, and origins, but their arguments against transhumanism still rest on the idea that ‘these technologies might undermine our human dignity or inadvertently erode something that is deeply valuable about being human’ but that is not necessarily quantifiable (Bostrom 2005, 203). While true, interpreting the milieu’s demonologies only in this way obscures specificities in their narratives. On the one hand, their theological bioconservatism reflects a privileging of being, especially stasis or being-in-place, over becoming. Proper ontological order must be maintained—angels must remain in heaven, humans must remain uniquely human, and the social order must not be overturned. To transgress god-defined limits, to shift from a state of being to one of becoming, is to court catastrophe.

On the other hand, beyond a focus on maintaining the stability of ontological borders, the milieu’s narratives reveal deep anxieties about the continuing place of (their) religion in a secularising world. They do not just demonise transhumanism, but rather casts it as the endgame of a historical movement tied to broader demonisations, to that ‘older religion’ remaining in the ‘ostensibly secular mind.’ RoM is an attempt to explain the trajectory and continuities of a history that has deviated from their prescriptions and expectations. As such their demonology of becoming can be seen as an attempt to

comprehend a growing sense of evitability to their inevitable ending—one tied to the workings of the very secular modernity they are attempting to explain.

ESCHATOLOGIES IN QUESTION

The milieu constructs a world in which (true) Christianity has been subsumed into a demonic secularism reaching its technoscientific endgame. As I will argue here, the complex relationship between religion and secularity lies at the heart of the milieu's demonologies, and their demonologies of transhumanism most of all. Rather than being religion's antithesis, secularity emerges from and rearticulates concepts from Christian theology. This mixture of origination and adaptation conditions the milieu's demonologies, creating discursive tensions in which secular modernity and transhumanism can be readily reckoned with (as demonic) and yet always exceed that attempted reckoning. This final section explores this reckoning, outlining the relation between secularity and Christianity regarding concepts of salvation and fallenness, and then contextualising transhumanism as having a distinctly secular soteriology that contests the milieu's onto-teleology, calling its eschatologies into question.

Religion, Secularity, Temporality

Since the millennium, a burgeoning field of scholarship has begun interrogating the intertwined nature of the religious and the secular.⁴ While these interrogations are diverse and multifaceted, certain aspects are able to shed light on the demonologies of Horn's milieu, notably those that explore the theological origins of the secular itself. This question of origin is particularly important since, as explored above, the milieu's demonology orients itself around ideas of divergence from originary stasis, becoming-other as becoming-demonic. Fixations surrounding progressive evolutionary schemata (whether political, spiritual, or biological) have, in the demonologies explored, hinged on notions of secularisation as a forgetting or rejection of authentic theological origin. These fixations, as I will demonstrate, are grounded in a particular reading of the historical development of the binary secularity/religion, emphasising distinctions in concepts of temporality.

The sociologist of religion José Casanova has noted that while the categories of religion and secularity are mutually constituted, the mechanics of this constitution has

shifted over time. While ‘the secular’ is increasingly seen in the West as reality *tout court*, to which religion is superstructural and superfluous, the concept of the secular originates in Christian theology as part of a binary dividing the world into sacred and profane realms (2011). This division is illustrated by the early Christian usage of ‘secular’ itself, in which the Latin *saeculum* designated ‘earthly existence’ in contrast to ‘eternal life with God,’ and marked the time counted until history’s end, when Christ returns and it would be supplanted by eternity: ‘It was temporary, a time of waiting, not simply years stretching infinitely into the future’ (Calhoun 2012, 341). Crucially, this time-space was not neutral but ‘the world of temptation and illusion’ (*ibid.*). As Craig Calhoun elaborates, the ‘contrast of sensuous and corrupt to ideal and pure is mapped onto that of secular to eternal. For one thread of the ensuing conceptual history, the secular is associated more with the fallen than simply with the created’ (*ibid.*, 342). Theologically framed, the secular world comes into being at the Fall and ends with Christ’s Second Advent; ‘the secular’ thus theologically names the time-space of that fallen creation.

This binarised relationship between secularity and religion is reinforced and complexified by the ways that ideologies of secularism adopted and adapted aspects of their theological parent. Casanova argues, for example, secularism appropriates and transforms a Christian model of linear, telic history in order to construct a ‘universal teleological process of human development from belief to unbelief, from primitive irrational or metaphysical religion to modern rational postmetaphysical secular consciousness’ (2011, 59). That is, they co-opt a model of Christian salvation history, culminating not in a second advent of divinity but in the secularisation of the world and concomitant erasure of ‘irrational’ religion. By doing so, Talal Asad observes, secularism partakes in a complex structural reversal: while ‘the secular’ was ‘a part of theological discourse... [now] –the religious’ is constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, so that ‘religion’ itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity’ (2003, 192).

This structural reversal would seem readily assimilable into the demonologies of Horn’s milieu. The triumph of secularity over religion (signified in the rise of the skyscraper, de-theologisation of science, and overturning of the *ancien régime*) was construed by them as one of the central reflections of growing demonic influence over worldly order. The passage of science—‘initially a God-given instrument for the broadening of human understanding’ (Collins and Collins 2004, 2)—into a secularised form of critical inquiry shorn of its scriptural roots is here emblematic of Satan’s

attempts to co-opt God's creation for his own ends, a relationship reinforced by the milieu's associations of Satan with the evolutionist and revolutionist paradigms of secular modernity. If the secular world is seen—as the milieu does—as a demon-ridden time-space oppositional to divine eternity, then the secular's subsuming of the religious in modernity becomes easily coded as a (more or less transient) triumph of that demon-ridden time-space over that of eternity.

Any construction of a straightforward binarisation between divine eternity and demonic secularity is troubled, however. Secularism's relation to its Christian origins is one of continuity as much as reversal. While for the milieu the secular/religious binary is mapped directly onto that of satanic/godly, to paraphrase Charles Taylor, the West becomes secular *because* rather than *in spite of* its religious heritage (2007, 791–2), and Graeme Smith has argued that secularism itself is a form of Christian ethics shorn of the structures of Christian belief (2008). Indeed, enduring traces of theology in Western secular ideas of progress, reason, and perfection have prompted Jean-Luc Nancy to question how *‘the West may be Christian in its depths’* (2008, 34).

Transhumanism's Secular Transcendences

Such direct mapping is contestable, however. Asad argues that while Christian narratives like redemption might have galvanised secular modernity's social projects, it does not necessarily follow that these projects are *‘essentially Christian.’* For Asad these projects have a distinctive politics (democratic, anticlerical), a different morality (focused on the sacredness of individual conscience and rights), and an understanding of suffering as *‘subjective and accidental’*—to be medically treated, as corrective punishment, or merely as *‘the unfinished business of universal empowerment’* (2003, 61–2). Taken together these characteristics construct the agents of worldly salvation as also worldly; immanent, not transcendent; human, not divine. This paradigm not only maps readily onto the milieu's concept of RoM, it relies on its own mode of temporality: it eschews clear ends in favour of endless perfectibility. This secular model of redemption is exemplified by transhumanism's technoscientific projects, which deploy a secularised language of perfection in which humanity becomes the perfecter that is perfected. Transhumanism's rearticulation of theological concepts is not just a continuation of secularism's more broadly, however. Rather than replicating secularism's progressive narrative wholesale, transhumanism envisions its own eschatologies, its own transcendences—ones that unsettle the milieu's own.

Transhumanism's reproduction of religious concepts and terminology is well documented within the current scholarship. Braden Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz note that one need not analyse its language deeply _to recognize an agenda for human betterment that in other contexts marks the domain of faith and spiritual practice... Immortality, perfectibility, dominion, transcendence' (2011, 17–18). Hava Tirosh-Samuelson goes further, discussing the explicitly apocalyptic logic underlying many transhumanist soteriologies, one which imbues _human-made technology with salvific value: the Kingdom of God will be realised on earth through technology, thereby making salvation both imminent and immanent' (2015, 165). Tirosh-Samuelson here highlights the emphasis on artifice that was central to RoM. However, her remark on the immanence of salvation points to transhumanism's imbrication in the worldliness of secularity, and via this to the fulcrum of the time/eternity binary.

In _Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology?' the theologian and ethicist Brent Waters argues that transhumanism and traditional Christian theologies operate using incommensurable models of soteriology and eschatology. He lists a number of areas of incompatibility, such as transhumanism's apparent disdain for material, embodied existence and its emphasis on _the desire of the will to become the perfect being that it wills itself to be' (2011, 171). Whether these are truly incommensurable aspects is debateable. Transhumanist disdain for materiality can be traced to strands of orthodox Christianity, stemming from Augustine, that privileges the mind as the site of God's image that marked human uniqueness (Deane-Drummond 2011), and some, like Philip Hefner, have attempted to reconcile transhumanist and Christian models of perfectibility (1993). However, Waters' thesis serves as a useful lens for exploring Horn's milieu. This is particularly the case in the context of one of Waters' incommensurabilities—temporality. Waters argues that transhumanists and Christians both agree,

...that the finite and mortal human condition is far from ideal... that humans require release from their current condition. For transhumanists this release is attained through technological transformation, whereas for Christians humans are transformed by their life in Christ. Both agree that death is the final enemy; transhumanists conquer this foe by achieving the immortality of endless time, whereas Christians are resurrected into eternity, where there is no time (*ibid.*, 164).

After describing a commonality in intent, Waters hits a point of crucial (dis)similarity: while both strive to overcome death, the means of achieving this end rely on differing temporal modes. Waters' critique focuses on death, arguing that transhumanism _fixates on death as medically curable (on the model of secular modernity's attitude to suffering

noted by Asad), and so devalues the embodied nature of life in the process. What Waters does not discuss is how such a temporal division replicates that of the religious and the secular as the differentiation of ‘earthly existence’ from ‘eternal life with God’ (Calhoun 2012, 340).

Secularising Demons

By articulating salvation as the ‘immortality of endless time’—whether this is achieved by substantial genetic modification, cybernetic augmentation, digitisation of consciousness, or another method—transhumanism constructs a model of soteriology that is irreducibly secular. Its vision of transcendence is immanent, worldly, based not on escaping time but stretching it into the future. If one adopts Waters’ distinction, transhumanist salvation hinges not on transcending secular time for eternity but on secular time’s becoming-infinite. And if, like Horn’s milieu, one adopts a perspective of the secular as not just the created—which, while he describes transhumanism as ‘an idolatrous religion proffering a counterfeit salvation,’ Waters broadly seems to (2011, 173)—but the fallen, the demon-ridden ‘world of temptation and illusion’ (Calhoun 2012, 341), transhumanism’s danger becomes clear. It marks not merely a system of belief proffering ‘counterfeit’ salvation, but the technoscientific possibility that this salvation might be (im)possibly attained.

Like many evangelicals with an apocalyptic or millenarian perspective, Horn and his milieu ultimately turn to a sovereign God, who will intervene to rectify errant history. However, this foregone conclusion—increasingly deferred—does not detract from the milieu’s continuing attempts to wrestle with a secular world in which it finds itself hopelessly entangled. Rather, it is a symptom. The demonologies of the milieu wrestle with their entanglement by drawing on specific genealogies of the secular (both as a model of temporality and the immanent space of modernity), and of the Devil as theological instigator, advocate, and symbol of that secularity. They filter these genealogies through their ‘—supernatural hermeneutics of suspicion’ (McCloud 2015, 62). Yet while other spiritual warfare discourses deploy this framework to explain ‘economic recessions, school shootings, [and] individuals’ problems with poverty or addiction,’ for example (*ibid.*, 115), the convergence of spiritual warfare, conspiracism, and bioconservatism in the milieu prompts Horn and his allies to construct a demonisation of secular modernity *in toto*.

Framed within the scope of this demonological hermeneutics and the selected (and selective) genealogies of secularism, the reading of transhumanism provided by

Horn's milieu becomes (more) understandable. Guided by the hands of secularising demons, secular modernity assents to the Fall. It accepts the temporal space of fallen reality and redefines it as reality as such. This alone would be anathema: secularism's immanent frame sits in stark opposition to spiritual warfare's worldview, hinging on the co-existence of earthly and heavenly realities and the relation between spiritual causes and worldly effects (or vice-versa). But the trait that makes transhumanism specifically threatening to Horn's milieu is its construction of a model of salvation set within that fallen reality, one emerging technosciences might (im)possibly actualise. Fitting into secular attitudes to suffering as *the unfinished business of universal empowerment* (Asad 2003, 62), transhuman soteriology centres not on transcendence from the *saeculum* but the becoming-transcendent of the *saeculum* itself.

Conclusion

In this article I have analysed how the anti-transhumanist demonologies constructed by Horn and his allies signal attempts to comprehend their imbrication in secularity, a comprehension that causes them to draw on and interpret a range of ideological and historical paradigm shifts. In the present, these interpretations hinge on a demonised vision of transhuman technoscience. For the milieu, the technoscientific attainment of transhumanism's salvific vision would herald not just the potential catastrophes of an Enlightenment gone astray—as other secular and religious critics of transhumanism might argue—but the advent of a counterfeit eternity, even an eternal counterfeit.

Such a counterfeit possesses a paradoxical sense of authenticity, tied to secularism's genealogical relation to religion. It is this relationship between religion, secularity, and transhumanism that the milieu's demonologies foreground. The latter's reproduction of religious concepts is well documented, but it is important to see this reproduction not as something (wholly) new but as an iteration of broader paradigms of secular modernity. Constructing a narrative (albeit a selective and reactive one) of the continuities, differences, and ruptures that bind religion and secularity, Horn's milieu calls attention to how transhumanism's reworking of an agenda *that in other contexts marks the domain of faith* is itself just one variant of the *unfinished business of universal empowerment* that may (or may not) be *Christian in its depths* (Allenby and Sarewitz 2011, 17; Asad 2003, 62; Nancy 2008, 34).

As the Baconian *not* with which I began marked the site of a possibility for salvation so too does this one. Whose salvation, however, is a question that haunts the

milieu's works, and understandably: transhumanism completes secularism's reversal of the secular/religious binary, with religion and spirituality becoming emergent properties of secularity's own immanent totality. Such a soteriology mirrors the milieu's in abject form, redefining religious terminology as secularisation redefined the place of religion, to the point where salvation itself becomes other, becomes demonic. The milieu's demonologies have the kernel of a truth: the structural reversal of religion/secularity did take place, and it marks not just transhumanism's reiteration of theological concepts but also the fundamentalist tendency, here exemplified, to supplement exegeses with empirical evidence—historical genealogies, conceptual affinities, and material artefacts that buttress an inerrant scripture no longer able to stand alone. Illustrating vividly the mutual and enduring imbrication of religion and secularity, Horn's milieu raises the necessity of deconstructing how fundamentalist and transhumanist eschatologies and soteriologies have been mutually conditioned by the (re)formations of (religion in) secular modernity.

Caught in and reacting to these (re)formations, the milieu's last recourse is to await a divine act that would restore the sense of their own ending. Transhumanism's secularised soteriology is thus condemned to inevitable failure. For Horn, it reveals the naivety of Garreau's 'Heaven' scenario, one in for a catastrophic awakening when 'the *spirit* behind the transhumanist nightmare will put the —hell ~~sooner~~ hell scenario || than most comprehend' (2013, 270). It is clear, however, that for Horn both scenarios are hell scenarios. In one, his apocalyptic vision is fulfilled—technoscience initiates the end-times, the worst aspects of a now-demonised humanity are unleashed, and salvation is lost to all but the remaining unenhanced survivors. Yet this hell on earth, harrowing as it may be, also offers the promise of salvation and the vindication of tested faith. The other, in which emerging technologies fulfil their promise of this-worldly perfectibility, offers no vindication—immortality and transcendence are achieved by artifice alone, the perfecter perfects itself through the perfection it wills itself to be, and the keystone of Babel is finally set in fulfilment of a promise offered by a serpent in a garden, long ago. Creation becomes—finally and forever—an 'utter and irrevocable outlaw' (Bacon 2000, 221).

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¹ This article mainly uses ‘evangelical’ to refer to the subset of conservative evangelicals known as fundamentalists. While evangelicalism can broadly be categorized by its emphasis on conversion experience, biblical authority, the centrality of the crucifixion, and activist commitment to good works, fundamentalism emerges as one specific part of this paradigm. Indeed, many evangelicals would deny association with fundamentalist paradigms, which Matthew Avery Sutton defines as ‘radical apocalyptic evangelicalism’ (2014, 3). The relation between fundamentalism and evangelicalism is multifaceted, however, and complicated by the use of the terms to refer both to specific historical movements and broader ideologies. In the USA, the conscious rebranding of conservative fundamentalists as ‘evangelicals’ in the 1940s (leading to the two often being used synonymously) also complicates differentiation in contemporary contexts—not least since it obscures, among others, the evangelical left. The group explored could be designated as evangelical, fundamentalist, or neither: its members self-identify as ‘evangelicals’ or ‘conservative Christians,’ and arise from the conservative evangelical tradition that runs through Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. Their emphasis on spiritual warfare, however, derives from pentecostalism, specifically from the neo-charismatic ‘Third Wave’ of the 1980s (McCloud 2015). Furthermore, despite claims to ideological purity and the primacy of biblical authority, its members draw heavily from pagan mythologies (notably Egyptian and Greek), Illuminist conspiracies, and ufology and ancient alien hypotheses (see, for example: Hamp 2011a; Horn 2013; Horn and Putnam 2012; Quayle 2014). The group is thus difficult to classify, and this article uses ‘evangelical’ mainly as a way of locating it in the US cultural context with which it is most consciously aligned.

² This group includes, at present, Thomas and Nita Horn, Chuck Missler, Michael Bennett, Gary Stearman, Sharon and Derek Gilbert, Douglas Hamp, Cris Putnam, Stephen Quayle, Michael Lake, John McTernan, Noah Hutchings, Donna Howell, Larry Spargimino, Douglas Krieger, Douglas Woodward, Paul McGuire, Fred DeRuvo, Carl Teichrib, Gary Bates, Russ Dizdar, Michael Hoggard, Terry James, Terry Cook, and Frederick Meekins, among others.

³ A focus on becoming as opposed to being (as stasis) is a core feature of feminist and process theologies, including Catherine Keller's *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2003), which I nod to here. Keller argues that orthodox Christianity rejected notions of creation from chaos in favour of asserting the absolute origin of a masculinised omnipotence able to create *ex nihilo*, a critique that could certainly be aimed to the milieu's stasis-centric beliefs. While there are conceptual overlaps, however, my aim here is to situate the milieu's demonology in relation to the development of secular modernity, not as an outcome of doctrinal exclusions.