CYBORGS IN THE PEWS: PROPOSING A CYBERFEMINIST THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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From its foundations, feminist theology has sought to address the contemporary questions asked of Christianity with an eye toward the needs and voices of women. One of the most prominent concerns of the 21st century is the growth of technology and its integration into human life. Feminist scholarship has already been asking these questions for decades in the form of the discipline of cyberfeminism. As feminist theology seeks to ask them as well, a conversation would be prudent, potentially moving towards a cyberfeminist theology. To begin down that path is a conversation between the work of feminist theologian Sarah Coakley and cyberfeminist Donna Haraway. With an in depth evaluation of the thought of both, bridges will be discovered to ease the forward motion of feminist theology into the contemporary, technologically saturated world.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis project has been quite the adventure and I have a number of people to thank. I will attempt to be (uncharacteristically) brief. Dr. Jana Bennett, thank you for being a patient and observant advisor. This project only exists because of your seminar on Sarah Coakley’s work and because of your passion and example. Drs. Bill Portier and Brad Kallenberg, thank you for being my readers. In what was likely a streak of naivety, I chose not to form my committee based on expertise alone. I wanted my team to consist of scholars whom I respected and trusted, even if they told me that my final product was terrible. You both fit the bill and I am grateful for your kindness throughout the last two years. Dr. Meghan Henning, thank you for being a mentor and a beacon of light this year. You are an example of the sort of scholar I hope to be; every graduate assistant you have in the future is very lucky! To my religious studies colleagues, thank you for making it so difficult to work in the office. The community has been a blessing and its company proved to be much better than grading most days. I am particularly grateful for my classmates from the Coakley seminar, for being stimulating and generous conversation partners. Christine Dalessio and Robert Parks, thank you especially for giving me your time, your attention, and your wisdom this semester. I do not know how I would have done
this without you. Christopher Crotwell, thank you for your love and support this semester. You are a model (male) feminist and a blessing of a partner.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank my interlocutors. Reading Donna Haraway’s work has been both a joy and a challenge. Six months ago, I had never heard of cyberfeminism; today I am a huge advocate for its exploration. I have her passion and rhetorical skill to thank. Sarah Coakley has officially been my intellectual companion for a full school year, and what a beautiful year it has been! Her work and her faith inspire me greatly. (If it is any indication of my feelings, I have adopted a new motto as this project gathered steam: What Would Sarah Coakley Do?) I am in debt to her, both as a budding theologian and as a Catholic woman. Despite the seemingly unending challenges they presented, I am a better person after this semester and this project.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the Book of Proverbs, the sayings of King Lemuel describe, among other things, the optimal woman. In this “Ode to a Capable Wife”, a number of qualities are outlined, from wise domestic management to her dress and appearance. The chapter’s reveals an expectation for wives to be much more than competent people; they are called to a specifically feminine sort of perfection. Typical feminine distractions are to be shed and replaced with piety. (“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”¹) She engages in strength and masculine roles appropriately (“She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong.”²) but she still meets feminine expectations like those of appropriate dress (“She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.”³). These requirements are prescribed very specifically for wives, and many of the admonitions deal specifically with the way she ought to relate to her husband (“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have

no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.”4). The qualities outlined in the chapter are indeed worthy of praise, but they also serve to reveal criteria for an unattainable and unreasonable female aspiration, a goddess-like figure of perfection. This goddess is a model of both wisdom and submission, of both meekness and strength. All in all, this portrait of a Godly woman is admirable. However, feminist and historian Donna Haraway ends her most famous essay with what feels like response to the claims made in Proverbs: “...I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.”5 In her eyes, the rigid confines of the so-called perfect woman are best abandoned. She rejects ideal femininity and instead praises the chaos, individualism, and technological promise found in her idea of the cyborg.

The conception of the ideal woman has always been tenuous and Christian theology has contributed both positive and negative pieces of the puzzle. Advances in the field of gender and feminist studies, particularly with respect to the global, pervasive reality of sexism, have complicated things further. These complications have brought wisdom and improvements, but they have also opened the door to a more realistic and, unfortunately, grim picture of the oppression that women worldwide face every day.

Parts of the painted scene demonstrate the obvious oppression, like the severe limits on education based solely on gender in the areas like Middle East. In

Pakistan, for example, a young female student named Malala Yousafzai spoke openly requesting respect for her right and the rights of her female peers to be educated. This simple rejection of gendered oppression was met with violence. She was targeted by the local Taliban group and shot, though luckily she survived.6

Other parts of the scene are less obvious. Victim blaming is a phrase used by feminists to describe the pervasive tendency for the fault of an incident to be placed on the victim rather than the perpetrator. This practice is frequently gendered against women and is used most in conversation regarding rape. An intoxicated high school student from Stuebenville, Ohio was sexually assaulted while unconscious at a party and attendees distributed photos and videos on social networks. Reactions both in the town and in the news media were focused more on the trouble that the woman brought on to the town and to the guilty students. In a New York Times article from December 12, 2012, one of the rapists’ football coaches claimed that “[t]he rape is just an excuse, I think,” and that the football players’ accusations only came because “some of the other schools in the area are simply jealous of [the football team].” In a news report on CNN on March 17, 2013, a reporter lamented the fact that the rapists’ “lives are destroyed” and that their registration as sex offenders “will haunt them for the rest of their lives” but made no mention of any concern for the emotions or future of the victim.

6 For a detailed personal account of Yousafzai’s story, see the autobiography co-written with Christina Lamb, *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*, Little, Brown and Company; New York, 2014.
Technology played a prominent role in both of these situations, both positively and negatively. In Yousafzai’s case, she was targeted due to her voice, amplified by her ability to travel and speak to world leaders on her struggles. However her sad but inspiring story has gained a great deal of traction through the internet, allowing the realities of sexism in many parts of the world to be dragged out of the shadows and into the light. In the case of the Stuebenville rape, social media became a vehicle for distributing material meant to humiliate the victim. News blogs and television networks allowed the glaring instances of victim blaming to be projected to a national, even global, audience.

On the whole, technological advances bring a mix of positive and negative contributions to the global reality of sexism. Education is often needed to use existing technologies and create new ones and thus access is restricted in many places to men. The internet can be a space that is run primarily by the privileged and amplifies the voices of oppressors, providing new ground to humiliate and belittle women. On the other hand, some technological advancements have helped to reduce costs, increase availability and ease, and tailor education to the needs to women worldwide. The amplifying power of the internet also applies to women and provides a chance for the marginalized and voiceless to be heard. These are only a few examples, but I believe that the variety make it clear that the world’s technologies complicate gendered experience. Understanding of the world continues to grow and the technologies used to engage with the world continue to become more numerous and more complex. As these technologies develop, questions surrounding women and gender will therefore become more
and more difficult to answer simply, and new and tailored ways to evaluate problems and solutions will become necessary.

These questions are all made significantly more complicated when a theological perspective comes into play. Theology brings to the table its own burdens, expectations, and gifts. Christianity has had a varied relationship with women and feminism, ranging from Jesus defying social norms in His interactions with women to periods of strict restrictions on female participation in the mass. Gendered tensions are tied into Christian. For example, nuns are seen to fulfill roles both empowering and restrictive, depending on perception. Female mystics like St. Catherine of Siena hold a special place in Christian spirituality but female Doctors of the Church are outnumbered by male Doctors three to thirty-one. Christianity has the opportunity to be a liberator and gift to women but it has demonstrated throughout history that is also has the ability to be an oppressor.

Christian theology has experienced a varied relationship with technology as well, though more subtly so. Despite Western cultural assumptions, Christianity has supported scientific and technological innovations through time, often because consecrated life offered a unique combination of education and space to experiment. As long as Christianity has been woven into and been an influence on culture, it has had to interact with the contemporary technological advancements. Unfortunately, contemporary scholars have only few examples of theological investigations of technology. There is scant evidence of feminist theologians tackling the subject with any sort of gusto. I am thankful for those who have contributed their wisdom, particularly those close to my own work, but
I do not think my regret at the overall lack is unjustified. Still, regardless of the theological attention, technology continues to barrel forward at an exponentially increasing speed. Orville Wright, co-inventor of the first fixed-wing aircraft was alive to see Air Force Captain Chuck Yeager break the sound barrier in an airplane for the first time in 1947. The speed of progress in the 19th and 20th centuries was clearly fast and it appears to only be accelerating faster today. Theology has a lot of ground to cover and it will continue to increase.

My project rests happily in this space of intersection, a shadowy and uncertain space where theology, womanhood, and technological progress meet. I propose that standing at this intersection point will yield interesting and useful insights. I believe, in fact, that this specific space will afford solutions for problems in all three areas that could not be found elsewhere. At the outset of the project, I have a number of questions. What does this space of intersection look like? More importantly, what are its specific and unique problems? My project turns its attention to one of these that rejoices in the complexity of the intersection. Is there a way to approach the progression of technology, utilizing its products and insights, from a specifically Christian theological perspective that aims to attend to the lives of those most in need, with a particular focus on the unprivileged lives of women? This intersectional space, this prospective feminist and technologically focused theology, is not well examined yet but I firmly believe that there is a great deal of practical wisdom to be mined here. However, I am not so presumptuous to believe that I can shed light into every corner. Instead, I hope that my specific investigation into how theology can
leverage technology to better serve and love women will begin the discussion and begin to attract the attention this space deserves.

The intersecting areas I tackle here are not completely unexamined on their own. There is a subfield of feminist theory called cyberfeminism that has already begun some of the work of describing technologies’ effects on women, and vice versa. Starting in the 1980s, cyberfeminism has investigated the ways that women’s lives are affected by technological advancements, both positively and negatively. It has taken a number of forms and very intelligent scholars have a significant amount of time asking and answering questions there. Similarly, the growing field of feminist theology is deeply concerned with the ways that women are fed and hurt alike by Christianity, both practically and philosophically. These two subdisciplines have developed without much regard for one another, but I aim to change that in this project. Technology scholars, and particularly cyberfeminists, have worked with concern about the needs and experiences of women. Both secular and religious feminists have debated the merits and the problems offered by theology and religious practice. Theologians have been investigating the metaphysical and practical realities of gender and of technology, though without any integration of the two. It is a pity, in my opinion, that these pursuits are isolated from one another and I see no reason why they should not be in conversation. It is my belief that the integration of these pursuits will result in a greater well of wisdom and a better life for women globally. This project intends to integrate and elaborate on these conversations to develop a synthesis that I call cyberfeminist theology.
In this project, I will create a conversation of ideas between two major thinkers in the fields of cyberfeminism and theology, filtering the results through my own perspective. I will examine the work of Donna Haraway, a historian of biology considered to be one of the forerunners of cyberfeminism, and I will examine Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley, an active feminist theologian whose work brings together Christian mysticism, feminism, analytic philosophy, and more. This project will approach each woman’s work with as much nuance as is possible given the space, and it approaches her work generously, allowing useful wisdom to be highlighted rather than rejecting her outright for the presence of anything problematic. It begins by aiming at no specific result aside from an exchange of ideas and an exploration through a new space. Rather than coming from a lack of planning or vision, this orientation will allow for a more organic progression through the ideas, more reminiscent of a genuine discussion. Though it offers no total definition, my hope is that this conversation and this project will throw some light into a darkened area that has the potential to do a lot of good.

Why should anyone, particularly theologians, care about my proposed cyberfeminist theology? I attest that, first, three parallel realities must be acknowledged. First, technology is constantly developing, becoming more complex and existing on a larger scale. There is a significant difference in complexity between, for example, the human ancestors’ first attempts at fire and one of the most impressive contemporary inventions, the Large Hadron Collider. The ground gained by technology is growing exponentially every day and antiquated views and approaches to technology become increasingly irrelevant at the same rate. Baring major catastrophe and systemic collapse, both appear to be
on track to continue this growth. Second, women experience the world in a very specific way. This has been investigated both systematically and anecdotally here and elsewhere and the results of that work point to the reality that gendered experience for women is riddled with oppression. Improvements have been made worldwide, to be sure, but gender discrimination and inequality have not been solved. Sexism remains and women are continually abused and pushed to the boundaries. Third, and perhaps most important to this project, theology has historically recognized two responsibilities: to guide the church through challenging facets of culture and to care for the marginalized and wounded in the world. As Jesus reached out to the rejected of society, so too do theologians optimally offer their intellect for the benefit of the church.

Next it is important to remember that these three areas do not operate in isolation. Each affects the others. Technology has the power to lift women up or keep them down. It would benefit from the addition of female minds and voices, but it exists in a space that is regularly misogynistic. It can prove to be a indispensible tool to religion at its best and it can be a golden calf at its worst. Theological voices have wisdom to offer to technology, though it may aim to support and ground or disregard and condemn. As mentioned before, religion is a space that has the ability to be a liberator or an oppressor to women and acting with undue power will push women further and further away from theological conversation and, more importantly, God. None of these spaces act individually. Many of their problems are shared and it is likely that many of their solutions are too.
Thus, I believe it is useful to all to engage in conversation that shares the wealth of knowledge and wisdom found in each. To that end, I affirm the viability of a cyberfeminist theology from the very outset of the project. I also believe that its findings will prove to circumvent some of the oppression that women face in the world, and perhaps the oppression faced by other marginalized populations as well. I hope that my humble facilitation of conversation between my two great scholars will begin a larger conversation that is curious about and engaged in all three intersecting parts. I have great faith in this conversation both to occur and to offer valuable insight and growth.

This project follows a methodology that I have carefully considered and constructed to best investigate the specific problems at hand. I have adopted a general flow of deconstruction, followed by reconstruction. Here specifically, that refers to the way that I break apart the initial assumptions and knowledge and then reassemble the most useful and compatible parts into this cyberfeminist theology. In the creation of a new approach and subdiscipline that integrates numerous seemingly disparate parts, I believe that initial deconstruction is key. This sorts out the metaphorical cells that make up the intersecting parts. Understanding these parts facilitates the finding of similarities between the dissimilar contributors. These shared spaces form the glue that holds the project together intellectually. It would be irresponsible, however, to leave pieces strewn about and so this project requires reconstruction to be complete. The pieces must be knitted together, setting aside that which does not fit and finding the kinship in unexpected places. Deconstruction and reconstruction together create a curious hybrid like the cyberfeminist theology for which this project aims.
How, then, will this project flow through deconstruction and reconstruction? Before engaging with the interlocutors, I will move through my initial proposition with this method. My proposed cyberfeminist theology can be broken down into three distinct parts: cybertechnology and its study, feminist study and theory, and Christian theology. From here, I determined five themes and concepts that compose these three parts and are readily found in the scholars at hand.

First, there is the theme of interdisciplinary approaches. This project necessitates an interdisciplinary approach because, obviously, it aims to bring two different disciplines into conversation. The intention is not to pit one against the other in a battle but to weave them together to create something new. Additionally, cyberfeminism and feminist theology are inherently interdisciplinary, as they both weave feminism into other fields. The interlocutors have integrated multiple disciplines into their work, as will be discussed in their respective chapters, and I intend to follow in their footsteps. Finally, both of these contributing disciplines often try to keep intersectionality present in their work. Haraway, for example, does not speak of sexism as an isolated phenomenon but consistently ties it to other issues like classism and racism. Coakley writes with a similar disposition. Neither is unique in their fields in this. Identifying their interdisciplinary approaches helps me to authentically reflect their views and carry the practice into my own conclusions.

Second, there is the theme of the physical world and the physical body. Technology is a manipulation of physical creations to assist bodies in living in the world. Gender also necessarily intersects with questions of the body, from
biological sex to gender presentation on the canvas of the body. Though this section will not discuss gender or physical technologies specifically, a base understanding of the nature of the physical world and of bodies provides a stable foundation for both conversations.

Third, there is the theme of the experience and reality of womanhood. From conversations about constructed gender as opposed to biological sex to those about gender as a necessary part of creation by God, I think I am safe to say that views on womanhood and all that lies within are tenuous. This project declares itself to be fundamentally feminist so the declarations of the scholars and of the project must be made clear.

Fourth, there is the theme of the presence of the divine in the world. The interlocutors here stand rather far apart from each other on the hypothetical scale of faith and belief in God. Understanding exactly where it is they stand helps the conversation follow and makes quite obvious the puzzle pieces that will need to be left behind. Finally, there is the theme of technology and the changing world. This project developed through the recognition of a world that is changing and growing. Though I have my own opinions of that motion, this project demands an understanding of how the interlocutors situate themselves in this shifting and changing world.

To begin the tangible work itself, I will deal with the representative scholars. I discuss Haraway and Coakley in distinct chapters. In each, I deconstruct their ideas, using the aforementioned five themes to sort through them. The goal in these chapters is to prepare for the reconstruction by separating out the useful and important pieces allowing the unnecessary or
problematic ones fall away. Though a single chapter per author is surely not sufficient to give a perfect representation of their ideas overall, I believe that the structure of scholar-specific chapters helps in giving a more nuanced view of their positions and broader ideas. Haraway’s chapter will be focused on shedding light on her ideas that built the foundation of cyberfeminism, a relatively obscure subfield. She has written a number of works that have little to nothing to do with cyberfeminism and so the chapter will have a narrower focus on her pieces that are considered formative for the intellectual movement. Greater attention and detail will be paid to the chapter on Coakley, given both a greater range of work available and relevant and the priority that this project has for theology. It is first and foremost a theological pursuit; cyberfeminism is an applied modifier.

After outlining the work of both scholars and describing how they intersect with my chosen themes, I will attempt to sew them back together again. I will bring them in line with the three parts of this project’s cyberfeminist theology. In this space I will embrace what will be fruitful and leave behind what will be an unnecessary burden. After tying the themes back into the subfield’s constituent parts, I will bring together the triad of fragments in attempts to create a cohesive unity. The cyberfeminist theology that I will form within this space is not conclusive and it not necessarily a perfectly accurate account. Instead it is a proposal, an explorer’s leap into the unknown with the hope that soon others will follow. My greatest hope for this project is not that my work may be mindlessly affirmed by well meaning peers but that new and fruitful discussions can be started in this new space.
At times, I use controversial terms and concepts in developing this project. Each of these is deployed for a reason and granting these premises will be crucial for conversation with my project. I chose the definitions and interpretations that I did for two main reasons. First, I attempted to err on the side of wider usages. Barring some specific examples and terms, my interlocutors do the same. Though they do not always state their definitions explicitly, many can be inferred. To maintain the conversation’s integrity and respect for my sources, I attempted to err towards agreement with them. I will conclude my introduction pragmatically by clarifying my usage of the major examples of these terms and concepts so the work in the following three chapters can be approached with understanding and generosity.

For example, I utilize the term feminism throughout my chapters. While entire theses could be written on how exactly to define feminism, I have implemented it as follows: here, feminism does not refer to just the study of gender and thus is not confined to conversations of gender role definition and relationships. Feminism is instead an approach that is cognizant of and concerned about the disparity of power experienced negatively by women that results in systemic, cultural, and interpersonal oppression. As a modifier for other disciplines or projects, feminism acts as a signifier that the project maintains awareness and concern for the needs of women.

Next, I often speak of the “world” in this project. I recognize that in many ways, this word is an amorphous designation that is used often but frequently defined in very different ways. When I speak about the world in this project there are few factors at play. Overall, my usage of the term is somewhat loose but it
Aims to denote a sense of the physical without a limitation there and an inclusion of realities that operate outside of my very specific perspective in life. It draws together the literal planet Earth and its inhabitants, but it also culture and constructions therein, and it does not exclude God in any way.

A major concept for this project is that of technology, occasionally referred to here as cybertechnology\(^7\). My general usage of the term draws more from colloquial understanding than may be assumed, but it is rooted in the scholarship that precedes me. Rather than attempt to summarize it, I turn to a quote from Read Bain published in 1937 that offers a widely accepted definition of technology.

> Broadly conceived, technology is the most important single factor in producing, integrating and destroying cultural phenomena. Technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them. Social institutions and their so-called non-material concomitants such as values, morals, manners, wishes, hopes, fears and attitudes are directly and indirectly dependent upon technology and are mediated by it.\(^8\)

This definition is useful for my purposes as it points out the urgency of the project. As stated before, by this definition, fire and the Large Hadron Collider are both technologies. Basic speech and high speed internet are technologies as well. When technology is simple, it requires little thought aside from the best way

\(^7\) I integrate the term cybertechnology mainly as a means of keeping continuity, largely for clarity’s sake, with the term cyberfeminism. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the prefix cyber- as “[o]f, relating to, or involving (the culture of) computers, virtual reality, or the Internet; futuristic”. Functionally in this project, the use of cybertechnology, especially in the concluding chapter, acts as a connection to the wider definition of technology while highlighting the fact that this cyberfeminist theology is dealing with a modern technological landscape that is a great deal more complicated than it ever has been before.

to use it to make lives better. When technology becomes as complicated and pervasive as it has, promising only more complexity in the future, the cyberfeminism project becomes more understandable. The new and more complex forms of technology change the way that life is mediated and they become a force that begs for considered discussion.
CHAPTER 2
AN EXAMINATION OF DONNA HARAWAY

The changing world has presented new problems and questions to feminist theory. This has led to an evolution of scholarship into a subfield called cyberfeminism. This term “describe[s] the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing, and exploiting the Internet, cyberspace, and new-media technologies in general”\(^9\). Cyberfeminists explore questions ranging from the construction of gendered identities online to the potential for gender-fluid or gender-free “bodies” existing in a utopian sort of cyberspace. At the very foundation of the subfield is historian of biology Donna Haraway. In this realm, she is perhaps best known for her early essay, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”. Her decades of work have initiated and in many ways sustained the cyberfeminist subfield’s progress. Her focus has ranged from the intersections of technological growth and economics to the relationship between humans and domesticated dogs. Her work has spanned a number of topics but throughout she maintains a strong intersectional feminist mindset and a great deal of hope for the promise that technological progress offers.

As previously mentioned, my methodological goal is to disassemble my interlocutors’ ideas, sorting the relevant pieces by the themes distilled from my proposed cyberfeminist theology and outlined in the intro. Here, I take Haraway through this process, with care to maintain the authenticity of her work. This method will give me the opportunity to extract the cyberfeminism-focused parts of her significant body of work, giving me the opportunity to build later bridges between her work and that of Sarah Coakley. Discerning individual parts ripe for integration, while maintaining the integrity of the whole, will serve the conclusion’s act of reassembly.

Before delving into these categories, there is a specific term that must be defined. Haraway is perhaps best known for her establishment of the concept of the cyborg. This term, coined in the aforementioned Manifesto, refers to the human in the midst of a changing and complicating relationship with technology. “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism,” Haraway describes, “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.”10 It describes the body as inescapably tied to and intertwined with technologies, “simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.”11 It is not a projection for the future or a designation for an extinct species; it is here and real today. It does not describe a cautious and removed factory worker or a distinctly inhuman robot. It occupies a space in between. In Haraway’s eyes, the cyborg has serious repercussions in sexism as “a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in

11 Ibid., 8.
the late twentieth century.”12 The cyborg is a core figure for her work, both as a description for what exists today and as a future solution to many of the presented problems. We will look more closely at it, especially its feminist applications, soon but the flow of this chapter is greatly eased by establishing this term from the outset.

**Interdisciplinary Approach**

At its core, cyberfeminism is an interdisciplinary project. It stitches together both practical and theoretical studies of science and technology with feminist theory informed both by philosophies and lived experience. It tends to integrate other relevant fields, like economics and race. True to trends in contemporary scholarship, it has an eye for intersectionality, for the complex interplay of different categories and fields that constitutes the experience of being a woman in a technologically advanced and advancing world. It follows that cyberfeminism, with its intersectional and interdisciplinary vision, would have been developed by a scholar who also exhibits and values these qualities.

A chronological evaluation may be the clearest way to demonstrate the rich variety of disciplines and training that Haraway brings. Haraway was originally raised in an Irish Catholic culture and educated in American Catholic schools. She studied zoology, English, and philosophy in pursuit of her Bachelor’s degree. She did work in philosophies of evolution before obtaining a PhD from Yale University, in a program integrating biology, philosophy and history of science. She has taught in myriad departments, from women’s studies to

12 Ibid.
environmental studies, history of science to anthropology. She clearly holds none of the stereotypical fear of blending hard sciences and the humanities, an approach that tends to provide more wisdom than restrictions.

This complex background is clear in her work. First, and perhaps most relevant for this project, her Catholic cultural heritage is a constant hue throughout. From a cheeky titular reference to the Creation myths\textsuperscript{13} to the direct tackling of Jesus Christ as the suffering servant\textsuperscript{14}, she utilizes religious imagery and metaphors throughout and is unafraid to use them both positively and negatively. She holds a reverence for the power of myth and her play with the idea of blasphemy in “A Manifesto For Cyborgs” is indicative of a fluency in religiosity. Her affinity for storytelling and powerful imagery seems to stem from a formation in Catholic imagination. This is not to say that Haraway explicitly confessed religious or theological priorities; on the contrary, she is unabashedly clear in her atheism. Instead, as I will discuss more in depth later, this cultural bias carves a space for shared language and experience in a prospective discussion with Christian theology.

Haraway’s writing, especially when viewed against her vast academic background, demonstrates even further complexity. She has disregarded the stereotypical barrier between the studies of humanities and the so-called “hard sciences”. Her movement between the fields betrays the artificiality of this wall


and reveals the alternative. This alterative is an intersectional approach, where conversation regarding the growth of technology is not complete without an examination of economics, where discussions of biological gender come hand in hand with those of social and cultural gender. It is a challenge to point to a single essay or book of Haraway’s that is narrowly focused on a single discipline. This intersectional approach is a gift in my project. There is no sense that cyberfeminism, especially as Haraway initiated it, is closed to outside offerings. Instead, it seems that attempts to bring new voices and ideologies to the party are welcome and that they would be fruitful.

There is an additional area of integration that is worth mentioning here. I stated in the introduction that for the sake of the integrity of my project, I am giving credit to Haraway’s bias toward technological and biological progress. She views history as progression in a forward direction, though the ultimate goal aimed for, the *telos*, is hard to identify. Progress forward is considered to be inherently positive, as are the advancements it brings. Technology becomes more complex, people live longer, and discomforts are erased; all of these and more are considered to be praiseworthy. Though I made note of this particular methodological point and its potential opponents early, I believe this theme lends itself to further description and speculation on this point.

Haraway’s academic background is predominantly based in history and biology. I argue that these two foci converge to create such a strong positive opinion of the philosophy of forward progress. She was formed in a contemporary historical context that culturally views progress as positive. Post-Enlightenment science works to become more complex, moving towards some
sort of end goal. It is constantly looking forward, building upon the knowledge and discoveries of forerunners in a sort of flipped pyramid. The contemporary study of history was formed in a similar milieu. The present acts not just as a chronologically later point but as a developmentally superior one. Mistakes are made and learned from and history progresses forward, growing and improving. There are certainly historians that deviate from this expectation but I believe I am safe in assuming, given her writing, that Haraway is sympathetic to this view. I will later elaborate on her view on technological progress, but here it is clear to see that she is disposed to a more positive reading of these developments.

**The Physical (Body), Now and Later**

Keeping Haraway’s deeply interdisciplinary background in mind, we move forward in constructing this prospective cyberfeminist theology. At its simplest, cyberfeminism brings together two seemingly opposite categories: woman, the biological being and/or cultural construction; and technology, the tools created to interact with the physical world. It is the center of the Venn Diagram between the fleshy and the metallic, the ancient and the new. To build this foundation, I look first to Haraway’s understanding of the physical world.

The initial assumption when investigating the physical may be to turn to the natural. Here, I use natural to describe an idea, however unrealistic, of the universe and the ability to control it, unrealistic as that may appear to be. The exact telos of contemporary science, if there is even a single goal to point to, is not relevant for this project. There are two themes, however, that I think act as an interesting background. First, scientific progress seems to be oriented more towards domination rather than the gathering knowledge. Second, it is implied that while simple can be a good trait, simplistic is bad, and complicated is optimal. I have neither the space nor the research to draw these ideas out to a worthy extent, but the effects of these themes, particularly on cyberfeminist theology, deserve more investigation.

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15 I posit that this goal may be a full understanding of the universe and the ability to control it, unrealistic as that may appear to be. The exact telos of contemporary science, if there is even a single goal to point to, is not relevant for this project. There are two themes, however, that I think act as an interesting background. First, scientific progress seems to be oriented more towards domination rather than the gathering knowledge. Second, it is implied that while simple can be a good trait, simplistic is bad, and complicated is optimal. I have neither the space nor the research to draw these ideas out to a worthy extent, but the effects of these themes, particularly on cyberfeminist theology, deserve more investigation.
world unmarred by the intrusions and improvements of technology. Haraway has studied biology extensively with periods of focus on evolution; she must give some credit or priority to the so-called natural states and processes of the world! However, it is obvious in even shallow investigations of her work that she does not see the natural as any sort of goal or metric. In fact, the category itself has become more complicated than ever.

Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.¹⁶

The boundaries are not as clear and comfortable as they were once understood to be. This new ambiguity led to Haraway’s coining of her now-famous term, cyborg. This discussion will be continued later in the discussion of technology, but it is crucial here to remember that she understands the ties between the naturally human and the artificially technological as an inescapable and exponentially growing reality today. The integration of man and machine has not led Haraway to a complete rejection of the so-called natural, biological world. Instead, she is invested in nature. Her work is just as concerned with, for example, the study of simians and companion canines as it is with the progression of technoscience. It marries the natural and artificial with neither completely obscuring the other; it is its own sort of cyborg.

As a historian of science, the bulk of her work is in the study of nature. Still, it is clear through her application and careful parsing that she appreciates the importance of the physical world. For example, in the process of

understanding modern language surrounding the self, she investigates the biomedical discourse about the immune system. This path is indicative of her cyborg-like methodology. “Myth, laboratory, and clinic,” she states, “are intimately interwoven.”

They are interwoven but, crucially, they are not cannibalistic; no one consumes the other but instead exist as compatible peers.

Haraway does not reject physical bodies, human or otherwise. Remember that her cyborg, simultaneously the present reality and the ideal, is not a machine replacing he human and its physical body. It is an integration. They are willing spouses in the cyborg paradigm. Typical boundaries are subverted and rebuilt; possibilities are increased and the world is better reflected through newly complicated spaces. The dichotomy between technological activity and so-called real life is broken down; the relationship between organism and machine allows space for the body to be a crucial part of the forward progression. The crux of Haraway’s problem is not found in the body but the restricting descriptions that have been used to describe it. “Cyborg imagery,” she describes, “can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.”

The end of the maze is not a world where bodies have been surpassed and discarded; it is a world where bodies are more perfectly understood and described. This position will be crucial in the concluding synthesis of this project. Much of Christian theology, including that of fellow interlocutor Sarah Coakley, considers the body to be very important. Theological

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attempts to completely reject the body have consistently been deemed heresy, as in Gnosticism, perhaps the most prominent example. Without the body, gender is complicated, but more importantly, the Incarnation is rendered useless. Without the Incarnation, the entire Christian theological project is upended. Knowing that Haraway seeks what she considers to be the best treatment of the body allows for an easier and more copacetic synthesis later.

What Is “Woman”?

After affirming the physical ground beneath Haraway’s feet, my attention turns to the crucial modifier separating feminism from other systems and philosophies: a focus on the experience of being and the needs of women as a means of compensating for their continued and systematic marginalization. This is another area that seems simple to address. Womanhood appears to be easily coded in both human biology and culture. Investigate that side of the binary and evaluate the needs and problems it faces. If only the question was so easy to answer!

Haraway’s relationship with womanhood is complicated. She acknowledges gender as an important category, as a space of oppression and domination, as a source of unity (of at least priorities) and a catalyst for fracturing. She identifies as a feminist, especially in the context of combatting culturally embedded androcentrism, and her work is both from a female perspective and prioritizes the needs of women at large. The difficult arises when trying to understand who or what women at large exactly are.

In the beginning pages of “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”, Haraway spends a significant amount of time attacking the notion of unity in womanhood. “There is
nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women,” she states. “There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female”\(^{19}\). Single modifiers do not automatically create a union between those who claim it. When combined with other modifiers like her commonly cited race and class, a necessity when attempting to encounter the world in its complexity as Haraway does, the assumed harmony falls away. This understanding is not completely singular in feminist theory but it is not stated so bluntly very often. Still, she maintains a commitment to the feminist project, using an intersectional approach to account for other modifiers and asserting that, “[c]yborg feminists have to argue... that no construction is whole.”\(^{20}\) Instead, the goal is to try and represent as much of the complicated reality as possible, including the fact that, while in her eyes metaphysically flawed, womanhood is a designation that has a direct effect on and use in lived experience.

Relatedly, the boundaries originally meant to distinguish male from female are more challenging to distinguish than ever before. This is evidenced by the way that Haraway deals with sex and reproduction. Human reproduction is a typically female-identified act that Haraway visits often and that serves as a clear example of this boundary blurring. Before the method of reproduction was clear and stagnant, focused on the female bearing and birthing the child. Now, “[s]exual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many, with costs and benefits as a function of the system environment.”\(^{21}\) This language demonstrates how the whole process has changed as biomedical science has

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 21.
progressed. The role of the woman in conception, gestation, and birthing has changed too. “[W]omen’s bodies have boundaries newly permeable to both ‘visualization’ and ‘intervention’” which renders them vulnerable to previously untold manipulation through a medical system almost exclusively controlled by men. Thus, this typically female realm is now a space shared with male hands, androgynous fertility experts, laboratory equipment, and hospital rooms. This is only one example in the midst of numerous feminine traits that do not stand as strong or clear as they once did. This is praised by Haraway. As will be discussed soon, the cyborg relishes in chaos and authentic and individualized representation. A promotion of a singular female experience, then, only serves to splinter the female-identified and serve the ostracizing created by, among other powers, patriarchy.

Fortunately, the blurring of gender boundaries does not mean that the feminist project needs to be abandoned completely. There is hope. As to be expected, this hope is found in Haraway’s cyborg. It is a feminist creature “that does not embrace Woman, but is for women”23. It is post-gender, insofar as it rejects the implied necessity of the production of gendered subjects that experience the world differently. It exists in certain discomfort and complications; it revels in what Haraway calls “noise” and “pollution”24. By thriving in this noise, the lines that previously served as wedges are rendered harmless. They become parts of the stories of women, distinctions that constitute

22 Ibid., 29.
part of their unique experience, without being impermeable barriers. Gender distinctions are no longer useful as descriptions of disparate relationships. Whether fairly or stereotypically, the feminist pursuit is understood to be movement towards equality of gender that reinforces the problematic binary system. In the world of the cyborg, feminism is a step in a process that pushes against oppression while philosophically undermining the systems that established it. True to Haraway’s methodology, biology is not eliminated and culture is not ignored. Eyes pointed toward the horizons of technoscience work in tandem with hearts caring about those who suffer and feet standing firmly on the ground.

**Technology and the Changing World**

With a solid stance in the physical world established and an orientation for the experience of being a woman, I may step forward to assess Haraway’s understanding of technology. This facet is obviously essential to her work. I will build on the introductory definition of technology offered earlier, distilling the definition Haraway takes for granted. From there I will revisit the term cyborg, synthesize what I have learned thus far and contextualize it in her understandings of technology.

I am hard pressed to point to a single, simple definition of technology as provided or used by Haraway. My assumption is that the term is a reality assumed in her fields. The questions do not ask what technology is; they can point to physical and intangible examples all around them. They are concerned with the how and the why, with the histories and the driving philosophies, the intersections today and the problems in the future. My definition will then not
necessarily be perfect all-encompassing description.\textsuperscript{25} Instead I will provide observations that will help situate Haraway’s projects.

Technology generally refers to the modern development of machines, artificial constructions that are not necessary for bare minimum biological processes. These machines assist in the work of life. To be sure, technology has existed throughout time. The fire harnessed by early humans is certainly technological. However, Haraway’s understanding of technology adds on new connotations. Technology is no longer just mechanical manipulations for physical objects. It is a space both physical and digital. It is deeply complex and tied to human lives in an irreversible way. While discussing the changes in boundaries that allowed her explorations, she points to the new relationship between humans and machines.

This dualism [between human and machine] structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste. But basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man’s dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.\textsuperscript{26}

Though her language may signal visions of a dystopian future full of robot overlords, Haraway does not fear these changes. She is neutral towards them insofar as she believes in the malleability of technology. As a historian, she

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] If a more standard and clear definition is desired, refer to my introduction, page 15.
\end{footnotes}
investigates the movement of technology, particularly in bioscience, in ways that are critical. There are many ways where the harm done by development is significant enough to potentially outweigh any good. However her criticisms appear to stem from hope for the positive power technology potentially holds. She argues for the importance of “taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology,” because they offer a “possible means of great human satisfaction” as well as a means of escaping negative cultural constructions.\textsuperscript{27} Her approach is critical, to be sure, but it is also deeply invested and interested in forward progress.

In the line of this multifaceted potentiality, Haraway understands technology as deeply tied to economics. It is not a cold system that is isolated from lived experience. It necessitates analytic work, to be sure, but it is also modified by economic realities. It is funded by resources allocated by the present economic systems. Technological progress does not barrel forward without concern for the world around it. On the contrary its products are dictated by the needs and desires of the system. Progress occurs within “a historical system depending on social relations between people”\textsuperscript{28}. Haraway centers her Manifesto’s focus on economy and technology on the changes in labor. As the system searches for new ways to increase production and efficiency, technology is developed which cannot be separated from problematic ties to facets like gender. Women become the new workers and rather than being a force for pushing out

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 25.
oppression, they manipulate and exacerbate it. Women are also effected in this intersection of technology and economics through, for example, changes in food and hunger politics and, as mentioned before, reproduction. Technoscience has not proved to be a gender-neutral pursuit; it has appeared to be exclusively sexist.

Haraway does not see this sexism as inevitable. Instead, this is the place where the cyborg comes as both a description and a solution. To reiterate, she defines the cyborg as, “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”\(^{29}\). She claims that all modern people are, in fact, cyborgs, unable to escape their complex interconnectedness with machines. Cyborgs exist as “the [so-called] awful apocalyptic telos of the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation”\(^{30}\), born of the technological progress that developed intrinsically tied to the post-Enlightenment physical body. It is the individual result of the ways in which technology is inextricably connected to the world.

The reality of the complexity of the cyborg offers her a space to escape the feminist frustration created by the impossibility of unity. In fact, it is the nature of so-called cyborg feminists that they “do not want any more natural matric of unity” and recognize that “no construction is whole.”\(^{31}\) Rather than attempt to force unity by, in her terms, domination or incorporation, the concept of cyborg creates a different space. People (and objects) can be codified, disassembled and reassembled, allowing for the complex self to be communicated authentically.

This truly is the space of the cyborg, with mechanization integrated just as much

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 16.
as physical machines themselves. There may seem to be a space here for a sort of unity in this commonality of numbers and categories. Instead she insists that rather than seek perfect translation and communication, cyborgs revel in the reality of individual diversity and a multitude of resounding voices. Unity under restrictive identifiers is not important. The pursuit of clear and comfortable unity results in binaries that alienate and defeat their purposes. The noise reveled in by these cyborgs pushes away the dichotomies like gender that cause the aforementioned toxic and pervasive\textsuperscript{32} problems.

**The Presence of the Divine**

The project has traced through Haraway’s work so far, investigating the foundation for her cyberfeminism. I have now arrived at the key modifier in the project: the interjection of theology. In order to prepare for a dialogue with Coakley and thus the path for a cyberfeminist theology, I must outline the space allotted in Haraway’s work for God. This task is not simple. Despite her aforementioned use of themes and images pulled from Christianity, Haraway does not deal directly with religious practice or the divine as Christian theology understands it. The goal then is not a summary of her religious position. I will investigate her stances, to be sure, but the larger pursuit will be a synthesis to determine what space remains. Where can God enter in Haraway’s work?

\textsuperscript{32} It is worth noting here that Haraway’s focus is very clearly and intentionally the West and thus the pervasiveness of the problem is centered there. The power systems of capitalism and the like that she identifies are specifically codified as Western problems and the unfortunate result of Western progression. Exploration into the application of her views to the East, or their extension into something befitting humans as a whole, would be interesting and worthwhile.
At the outset, it is important to note that Haraway takes for granted the absence of the divine. Despite her previously discussed formation and schooling in Catholic Christian culture, there is no effort to assess the role of God in technological progress, let alone profess any sort of belief. Her worldview seems to instead operate on the decidedly atheist principle that human progress is the force that develops and sustains the world. Forward motion occurs through ingenuity and work. There are no acts of God, only acts of man. The goal aimed for is not heaven, but instead seems to be world liberated from oppressive forces, driven by creativity, and fully understood through scientific investigation. It appears that the desire behind technology is to move closer and closer toward the omnipotence and omnipresence that is stereotypically only relegated to God. Humans are the (currently) supreme agents in the world, independent from any semblance of the divine. There is no abandonment because there was never anyone or anything to do the abandoning. Her position is the exclusively secular, science and progress driven one expected for a scholar of her interests.

As a post-Enlightenment thinker, it may be assumed that Haraway gives no space for the divine. It would be easy to write her off as a disenchanted biologist and historian, but I believe that would be not only unfair but also incorrect. Whether attributed to a vestigial Catholic sense or a sort of mild secular mysticism, Haraway is not completely separate from the raw materials for the divine. I see two spaces in particular that demonstrate great potential: her focus on myth and stories and a distinct drive for justice.

Haraway’s foundational Manifesto is designated from the very beginning as a myth. As with so many of her frequently used terms, she does not provide a
definition of myth as she uses it. I can deduce, however, that she uses myth in a typical way, referring to a constructed story that does not necessarily contain empirically true facts but works to convey broader ideas. It utilizes irony and blasphemy, a term she uses without their negative connotations, noting that their use is a faithful practice that “always seemed to require taking things very seriously”\textsuperscript{33}. It carves out a space for play, for metaphor and exploratory storytelling. It is not an exposé or a textbook; it is a playground.

This myth marks the beginning of Haraway’s proclivity for sharing and creating stories. Whether contrasting the stories of Sojourner Truth and Jesus Christ to investigate a suffering servant archetype to the recounting of the stories behind and constituted by scientific experiments with simians, one of her most valuable and well-used currencies is story. She recognizes the power behind language beyond pure annotation. She understands that myths provide more than narrative facts. Stories are greater than the sum of their parts. This obviously follows in the footsteps of the centuries of storytelling and story crafting intrinsic to the Christian tradition. In an interview, Haraway discusses the layered meanings throughout her work. She notes her Catholic foundation as “deep in her bones”\textsuperscript{34} and discusses reading Thomas Aquinas at age twelve. Declaring both distance and affinity, she states, “…I am, of course, a committed atheist and anti-Catholic, anyway at some level… But that theological tradition is a very deep inheritance for me, and I think it affects my style very deeply.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” 8.
\textsuperscript{34} Haraway, “Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations,” 333.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 334.
Through her stories, she is inescapably a part of the Christian intellectual and imaginative tradition. Additionally, and perhaps more deeply, her adherence to story seems to nod to the capacity for something transcendent. Maybe the larger power of stories can be attributed to series of synapses firing in the brain in a way that is not yet understood, but perhaps there is space there to find something transcendent.

Haraway is clearly concerned for the least of these in society. Her association with feminism and her awareness of intersectionality with particular attention to race, class, sexual orientation, and ability demonstrate an awareness of very real inequalities. Though the bulk of her work as historian is focused on evaluation and description, she is deeply formed by concern for the oppressed, needy, and forgotten. She clearly hunger and thirsts for justice. The term and concept of justice is not explicit in Haraway’s work but I do not think I am out of line in appropriating it. For example, her “Manifesto” spends a great deal of time wrestling with a particular feminist and economic issue:

The feminization of poverty — generated by dismantling the welfare state, by the homework economy where stable jobs become the exception, and sustained by the expectation that women’s wages will not be matched by a male income for the support of children — has become an urgent focus. The causes of various women-headed households are a function of race, class, or sexuality; but their increasing generality is a ground for coalitions of women on many issues. That women regularly sustain daily life partly as a function of their enforced status as mothers is hardly new; the kind of integration with the overall capitalist and progressively war-based economy is new. The particular pressure, for example, on US black women, who have achieved an escape from (barely) paid domestic service and who now hold clerical and similar jobs in large numbers, has large implications for continued enforced black poverty with employment.36

This reality is not metaphysically inevitable; it is constructed through systems that are, among other things, classist, racist, and sexist. She recognizes this as a symptom of a broken system because she recognizes that it is not, in my words, just. Her awareness of that which is disordered and a desire to change it mirrors the lasting focus on justice in the Christian tradition. The source of order and the underlying catalysts for change differ from the theological approach to justice, but there is certainly common language there. Social justice concerns have long been a space for dialogue and even unity between religious and secular groups. I believe the same may be true here.

Haraway is distinctly not a professed Christian but it would be foolish to consider her a stranger to the world of religious practice. She possesses similar language and rhetorical techniques, and shares some priorities. Additionally, the Christian realm does not consider discussions of nature, progress, and technology to be completely foreign. This dialogue between Haraway and Coakley is founded on these commonalities. Regardless of the value judgment or appraisal, technology is changing, increasing, and becoming more complicated. If theology, particular that of the feminist ilk, wants to engage with those changed, Donna Haraway has the potential to be an abundantly fruitful discussion partner.
This project aims to move towards a cyberfeminist theology through a discussion between a secular cyberfeminist voice and a feminist and theological voice. I have presented the cyberfeminist side of the discussion through the iconic perspective of Donna Haraway. It is now time to bring the theological stance to the table. For this, I turn to Sarah Coakley as a partner. The current Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, Coakley offers a range of necessary similarities to Haraway, as well as numerous welcome contrasts. While certainly not the genesis point for the subdiscipline of feminist theology, Coakley has proved to be a powerful voice on gender, as well as a number of other topics. Her work cannot be confined to a single interest but instead weaves together topics from gender to patristics, from analytic philosophy to evolutionary biology. She is deeply comfortable with collaboration, particularly with secular sources that may otherwise be considered off limits by other theologians. She integrates the wisdom of the past with the realities of the present and the needs of the future. Though she has not yet commented on cyberfeminist thought, her methods, research interests, and theological offerings make her an easy fit for the project.
Before diving into Coakley’s thought, I must take the time to make a few brief methodological notes. I chose to explore Haraway first and in a particular way for a reason. Haraway, as the figure whose thinking is being appropriated and critiqued, deserved a full description in due space, and presenting her ideas first allows for a more focused context to tackle Coakley. As an interlocutor, Coakley serves as the grounding in the project in theology, as above all this project is theological. She will provide an example of contemporary feminist theology and in the final chapter, her boundaries will mark the space through which I will pass Haraway’s ideas. Coakley’s thought is not the final verdict in feminist theology, to be sure, but she will provide a helpful anchor as a ready conversation partner. Likewise, I presented the themes in relation to Haraway with intention. I chose to move from the clearest themes to the most speculative and I maintain this method her. Thus, the order of the themes has changed.

**Interdisciplinary Approach**

I begin my exploration of Coakley as I did with Haraway, by focusing on the interdisciplinary nature of her work. This shared methodological inclination between the scholars provides a space for conversation that draws on the differing work of the other. It will also point to some mutual interests that will work as some beginning foundations. Coakley’s path does not meander in the same way that Haraway’s did, but her interdisciplinary approach is clear, particular in her more recent work.

At her core, Coakley is a theologian. This field is interdisciplinary in nature, varying in degrees depending on the subfield. Theologians tend to draw from fields like philosophy and literature in the development of their thought, as
well as from material that more commonly might be considered "theological," such as scripture and writings from various practitioners. Coakley is no different. Her specific focus is systematic theology, the way of working through theological questions methodologically that draws on other disciplines to make progress. She has focused on Patristics, pneumatology, Trinitarian theology, and developing a contemplative theology, all primarily as a systematic theologian. She has also recently stretched into ethics, contributing papers to an annual symposium that she chairs and working with doctoral students focused on theological ethics. Consistent with her work as a systematic theologian, Coakley also works and teaches in philosophy of religion. She is focused on analytical theology and philosophy, maintaining her methodical approach.

Coakley works in Christian theology overall, but she is specifically a practicing Anglican Christian, and an ordained priest in the Church of England. This affords her a particularly clerical and pastoral perspective in the world of theological scholarship, especially as a woman. Her life is dedicated not just to studying God but serving Him in a consecrated role. As a feminist, Coakley’s vocation as both priest and teacher serves to emphasize the gender equality that is explored both subtly and explicitly throughout her works. For example, in an opinion piece on the *ABC Religion and Ethics* blog on November 23, 2012, she discussed a church-wide vote that forbid female priests to become bishops in the Anglican church. Her commentary demonstrates an integrative approach to theology and ministry, with particularly feminist concerns and awareness.

Twenty years ago our Church voted to ordain women. We have arrived at the point when all the indications are that the current theological anomaly of priests who cannot by definition be bishops has become an
unacceptable *skandalon* to the Church’s life. This is not because of a capitulation to secular feminism; it is... because of a commitment to the historic nature of Christian ordained ministry and in particular to the distinctive theological principles of Anglicanism.

She advocates for women and understands secular feminism, but she is primarily concerned with her family of faith and ministry to them in the midst of the long history of Christianity. The pastorally oriented heart that led her to ministry is clear throughout her writings. Her words are not cold and removed, but full of life and concern. Her theology may be complex, but it is work done to serve God and His people in the world.

She does not, however, seclude herself to the discipline of theology. Instead, she actively and intentionally draws from other disciplines. One of the initial chapters in her first major systematic work, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, argues for the importance of the integration of social sciences in her comprehensive theology. This flows from her *théologie totale*. I will explain this approach at length soon, but I will note here that it is a systematic theology that “involves a complex range of interdisciplinary skills”\(^\text{37}\) and intentionally seeks out secular sources to examine with a contemplative mindset. In justifying the *theologie*’s orientation to secular sources, Coakley states that, “without the aid of social sciences there are many such realms of doctrinal enactment – rich, strange, debased, freshly creative – I cannot know about at all.”\(^\text{38}\) This approach is not restricted to social sciences, but also extended to the so-called hard sciences.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 77.
For how is it that we should decide what is ‘the means of man’s [human] highest well-being’, as Gifford put it, in a world torn by conflicting moral systems, pulsing religious beliefs and equally fervent atheism, and seemingly ever-escalating violence, if not in conversation between science, philosophy and theology?39

How exactly does Coakley balance this approach with her theological priority? It is culture’s opinion, of course, that religious thought and secular sciences occupy completely different spaces. Additionally, theology may approach the secular world with a sense of fear of corruption or derailing. Coakley takes a different approach.

I strategically dispossess myself to the Spirit’s ‘blowing where it will’ into all truth, just as, in prayer, each day, I try to practice that same dispossessing to the Spirit’s calling of me more deeply into the life of Christ, bracing myself for the bumps and lurches and surprises I have been led precisely by Scripture to expect...40

Her theological grounding does not cause fear in the face of interdisciplinary world. It gives her the knowledge of truth and a means to humbly seek it by following the Holy Spirit. The examples here deal explicitly with sociology and evolutionary biology, but they are demonstrative of the larger way that Coakley approaches her world and her scholarship.

Coakley is constantly aware of gender questions and includes feminist principles throughout her work. She can certainly be labeled a feminist theologian, but to limit her work to singular explorations of gender is to disregard the complexity that she brings. Only two of her books have gender as an explicit focus, the essay collection *Powers and Submissions* and the previously

40 Ibid.
mentioned *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, but to restrict her feminist theology to those two works alone would, again, would be limiting. For the more literally minded, her feminist theology is better extrapolated through a number of her published essays and articles. This is not to say, however, that her feminist preoccupations are limited to these works. On the contrary, there are impressions throughout her work of an understanding of gender inequality and disordered systems. She has a desire to understand gender in a theological context. Secular feminist theory has a presence in her work both as a gift and as a subject of criticism. She is a feminist theologian, even when is not handling explicitly “feminist” topics.

Coakley draws from social sciences, to be sure, but her horizon is wider than may be expected. As previously mentioned, she is a systematic theologian and analytic philosopher of religion. Her more recent work has taken that foundation and shifted it towards science. It is a well-worn contemporary stereotype that science and religion are polar opposites, completely incompatible with each other. Coakley recognizes this problem in academia. A great deal of the scholarly community sees “science as coterminous with atheism” and “...generations of theologians have been trained without any serious competence in science whatsoever. I myself was one of those victims,” she claims. “But I have repented me.”41 The larger implications of this shift for Coakley’s view of the physical will be discussed later, but here I will highlight its implications for her method.

41 Ibid.
The clearest forms of her repentance are the science-focused volumes she edited and contributed to and her part in the Gifford lecture series. Two books on Coakley’s impressive list of publications deal directly with intersections between, among other disciplines, biology and religion. The first, *Pain and Its Transformations*, resulted from a conference, held as a part of a series at Harvard University. The project brought together experts from fields like neurobiology, sociology, and theology to discuss the role of pain, suffering, and their potential alleviation in the world. The book, printed from the lectures and discussions at the conference, shows active interaction between disciplines with openness to the wisdom of all. Coakley edited the volume and provided an introduction, afterword, and a piece on pain and the Contemplative tradition. The second, *Evolution, Games and God*, is one of her most notable and recognizable projects. Working with mathematical biologist Martin Nowak, the volume brings together game theorists, biologists, philosophers, and theologians to discuss new perspectives on evolution and the progression towards a model focused more on cooperation and altruism rather than strict competition. As a result of her research with Nowak towards this book, though before it was published, Coakley was invited to be a part of the Gifford lecture series, a tradition dating back to the late nineteenth century of lectures given on topics relating to Natural Theology and the intersections between science and religion. Coakley’s series, titled “Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation and God”, demonstrated a keen theological mind, to be sure, but also a mind that also truly understood the science at hand. These highlights, I believe, pull into focus Coakley’s overall interdisciplinary approach. She brings a particular expertise to
the table, as well as a curiosity and openness to other disciplines. She respects them, critiques them, and integrates her work with the places of truth she finds in them. The integrative approach is characteristic of Coakley and will be a great help in this project, as she is source ready for collaboration.

The Presence of the Divine

Here, rather than moving directly into the physical world, I am turning my attention to Coakley’s understanding of the divine in the world. This facet is the most explicit of the themes in her work and will contextualize the development of the themes to come. It is also the most crucial piece of the Coakley puzzle for my final results.

It would be easy to take Coakley’s stance on God for granted, making assumptions of her belief given her work both as theologian and priest, but that would not do justice to this project. My focus will be twofold. First, I will outline Coakley’s understanding of the divine, of how God interacts with the world and with the lived, physical experience of human beings. The concerns of cyberfeminism is deeply rooted in physical reality, as demonstrated in the exploration of Haraway, and my final cyberfeminist theology will need to augment those roots with interaction with the divine. To this end, I will mainly focus on her concept of théologie totale and within it, her interest in contemplation. Then, I will briefly explore Coakley’s eschatology. Haraway’s cyberfeminism offers little by way of a clear future goal or purpose. What telos does appear to exist will have no space in the cyberfeminist theology because it looks to a future in which God is absent. The atheistic approach only offers a misplaced goal. Luckily, theology can meet this need through its eschatological
visions. Coakley’s work has yet to deal heavily with eschatology, but much can be inferred, and her theological viewpoint offers a constructive solution to the cyberfeminism’s telos problem.

To begin the analysis of Coakley’s theology, I highlight two prominent themes found throughout her work: the théologie totale and contemplation. These themes will both provide context and will also explicitly play into later analysis. First, I will turn to her core theological project, the development of a systematic approach, the théologie totale. The helpful glossary in God, Sexuality, and the Self defines the théologie as “a new form of systematic theology that attempts to incorporate insights from every level of society and to integrate intellectual, affective, and imaginative approaches to doctrine and practice”\(^\text{42}\). As its name implies, this theology seeks to encompass the widest breadth possible to account for the number of religious, culture, and political contexts in which Christianity is engaged. It is a model “not only founded in ascetic practices of attention, but also rooted in an exploration of the many mediums and levels at which theological truth may be engaged”\(^\text{43}\). It turns to marginalized populations, misused or ignored principles, and “neglected or sidelined texts in the tradition”\(^\text{44}\). It is characterized by action, adaptation, and growth, what Coakley coins a theology in via. It is a part of the systematic theology tradition, but bucks any tradition of impenetrable steel cages of thought. Instead, it invites fluidity and a sense of play into the process.

\(^{42}\) Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self, 352.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
[Théologie totale makes the bold claim that the more systematic one’s intentions, the more necessary the exploration of such dark and neglected corners; and that, precisely as a theology in via, théologie totale continually risks destabilization and redirection. In an important sense, then, this form of systematic theology must always also remain, in principle, unsystematic – if by that one means open to the possibility of risk and challenge.45

In the midst of the truly divine and sacred, there is no sense that her theological ideas and systems are unassailable. They are humble, flexible, and faithful. There are influences here from her feminist roots, with a mind for the oppressed and sidelined, and the interest of providing voice to the people and ideas that have been rendered voiceless.

Drawn from the foundations of the théologie totale, Coakley focuses particularly on prayer and spirituality. Her earliest work concentrated largely on Patristic thought, especially the recurring theme of contemplation. Contemplation has been a large influence to Coakley overall and her théologie totale specifically. She sums up contemplation so beautifully that I cannot resist excerpting her words:

The willingness to endure a form of naked dispossession before God; the willingness to surrender control (not to any human power, but solely to God’s power); the willingness to accept the arid vacancy of a simple waiting on God in prayer; the willingness at the same time to accept disconcerting bombardments from the realm of the ‘unconscious’... What is being progressively purged, in this undertaking, is the fallen and flawed capacity for idolatry, the tragic misdirecting of desire. One is learning, over a lifetime – and not without painful difficulty – to think, act, desire, and see aright.46

For Coakley, contemplation is not an intellectual façade of prayer superimposed on her work. She actively works to carve space in her work for the movements of

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46 Ibid., 19-20.
the Holy Spirit because it is for her the necessary way to do theology. The ascetical practices of contemplation are the tool she uses to carve that space and to guide her work. The unstable nature of théologie totale, for example, is tempered “through radical practices of attention to the Spirit”\(^\text{47}\). Its instability and flexibility is not a flaw, but a humble recognition of the powerful role due to the Spirit. Additional elaboration on the Spirit will soon follow, given its relation to her eschatology.

It is on this foundation of the Spirit- and contemplation-led théologie totale that I will now discuss Coakley’s notion of the divine in the world. It should come as no surprise that her work does not look to a detached or absent God. Instead, divinity refers to a God who is engaged and concerned. God is constantly in relationship, both in the three-ness inherent in the Trinity and in the two-ness embodied by relation to human beings. God has acted, acts, and will continue to act through time. As Coakley states in her chapter of *Evolution, Games, and God:*

> ...God is intervening constantly – if by that we mean that God is perpetually sustaining us, loving us into existence, pouring God’s self into every secret crack and joint of the created process, and inviting the human will, in the lure of the Spirit, into an ever-deepening engagement with the implications of the Incarnation – its “groanings” (Romans 8. 23) for the sake of redemption. God, in this sense, is always intervening, but only rarely do we see this when the veil becomes thin, and the alignment between divine, providential will and evolutionary or human cooperation momentarily becomes complete.\(^\text{48}\)

This constant intervening is necessary to understand the nature of God and, truly, the life of the people created by God. The implications of this quote, extended further than is excerpted here, for the physical body will be elaborated

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 49.

in the next section, but here it suffices to say that Coakley’s notion of the divine is not characterized by inference, cynicism, or pure rationality. It is one built from a relationship, one that recognizes the reality of a living Trinitarian God that is a genuine and necessary part of the world.

To understand Coakley’s theology in the context of my project, I cannot simply ask questions of the divine in the present time and space. It is important to also look forward, to discuss the idea of the end of that time and space and look for the end goal of the metaphorical race being run. An exploration of Coakley’s eschatology will provide a fuller picture of her theological position, and more importantly, will offer a properly focused telos to my cyberfeminist theology.

When it comes to Coakley’s theology, to talk about eschatology is to talk about desire. Desire is, for her, the crux of gender and sexuality, of human relationships and actions, arguably of humanity itself. It is fundamental as an “ontological category belonging primarily to God” which is reflected through human’s creation in God’s image. The deepest desire in humans reaches for God. Though many attempt to placate it through other relationships, those attempts are always insufficient.

That inherent desire, for Coakley, not only orders life in the world, but also orients where that life is leading. Human desire demonstrates the telos knit deeply into the heart. The physical world is not the end. The preoccupation with delaying and avoiding death is a sign of the human “erotic yearning towards a

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49 Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self, 10.
more elusive eschatological goal”\textsuperscript{50}. Mastering nature, perfecting technology, and cultivating interpersonal relationships are not end goals. They have worth, to be sure, but the ultimate internal compass points towards union with God. This desire for union and the ways that it shapes relationships between humans and both God and others will become an integral piece for the cyberfeminist theology to come.

\textbf{The Physical (Body), Now and Later}

Grounded in her interdisciplinary theology, I move to this project’s next theme: the understanding of the physical world and the bodies in it. Coakley’s interest in the physical, especially the body, is clear throughout her works as both a major theme and an undercurrent. Though her interest in bodies is deeply tied to her concerns with gender, I will briefly set this intersection aside to be discussed in the next section. Instead here I will take the time to grow roots, so to speak, in Coakley’s understanding of the physical. Through this survey, I will stay securely rooted in her theology. God created the world and the physical remains tied deeply to God throughout time. This study of Coakley and the physical remains, then, rooted in the theological. Additionally, this study will deal with the natural world largely and the body specifically. The progression from the general physical to the specifically embodied will assist in keeping theology present in physicality of cyberfeminism for the coming synthesis.

To this end, this section will combine a general discussion of themes relating to the physical world in her work, and a more specific investigation of her

\textsuperscript{50} Sarah Coakley, \textit{Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender} (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 156.
later work with evolutionary biology. First, I will make note of the topic transition evident in Coakley’s work. I think that the mere fact that her focus has recently shifted towards science reveals something interesting about the way she views the world. I will elaborate on this focus shift before delving more deeply into the specifics of her scientific and theological work. This will give an entry point to understand not only Coakley’s view of the physical but also her understanding of God’s interaction with it. It will also provide the foundation for the later discussion of technology, pointing the spaces where it may fit into Coakley’s worldview. Finally, I will highlight some facets pulled from her book *Powers and Submissions* that show some of the contemporary problems with the body and the ways that Coakley addresses them. It is important to note here that the overall section will not provide her total perception of the physical world and human embodiedness. The specific discussion of bodies is difficult to separate from the discussion of gender in Coakley’s work, so a more elaborate discussion of that facet will be discussed in the next section.

Coakley had a theological and philosophical formation and her work as a systematic theologian and analytic philosopher kept her immersed in the humanities. She notes that, “generations of theologians have been trained without any serious competence in science whatsoever” and that she “was one of those victims.”51 She overcame that ignorance and has actively worked to learn about science. I have highlighted how her work with the sciences demonstrates her interdisciplinary approach, but I believe that there is something more to be seen in that shift.

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51 Coakley, “Stories of Evolution, Stories of Sacrifice.”
Coakley has a deep love for and interest in the contemplative life, as well as other areas that can be considered more abstract or theoretical. As her work progressed, and prompted perhaps by the pastoral influence in her vocational changes, her theology rooted itself in the world, concerned with physical realities and the implications of theological truths. The questions posed by science, like those of gender, pain, or evolution, proved to be pressing and Coakley saw the ways in which her expertise could help. Fissures between science and religion grew to be cavernous in the contemporary world because, “the public stage has been left to a worrying degree to those who see science as coterminous with atheism.”

Luckily, Coakley realized that she held some of the tools to help rebuild bridges. In many ways, her modern work has been that of an ambassador or translator as much as a theologian. Her shift of both focus and role highlights the wide gathering of wisdom and pastoral concerns found throughout her work. Theology has important answers and questions for science and for the physical world, and the theology she develops is decidedly not Gnostic. Integration with proper priorities, namely God and the Christian spiritual and theological pursuit, seems to be her goal. Her focus on the physical, characterized by recognized importance but not idolatry, will serve well in conversation with Haraway, who seems to share her method, though not all of her priorities.

With this context of Coakley’s turn to science in mind, I now describe exactly what her shift involved in terms of her thinking. I briefly described her collaborative scientific pursuits above, but I will examine one specific line more

52 Ibid., 4.
closely now: specifically, her efforts to meld evolutionary biology and theology, which in turn shows her understanding of the physical world.

She discusses this in her edited volume *Evolution, Games, and God*, which tackles a specific avenue of the study of evolution: cooperation, defined as “a form of working together in which one individual pays a cost (in terms of fitness, whether genetic or cultural) and another gains a benefit as a result.”53. Rather than understanding evolutionary practices as brutish and selfishly competitive, cooperation-focused evolution theories interject altruism, here defined as “a form of (costly) cooperation in which an individual is motivated by good will or love for another (or others)”54. This means that the Darwinian model of survival of the fittest is rendered incomplete. Self-sacrifice for individuals and communities are an empirical piece of evolution. The project explores the intricacies and implications for a cooperative model, opening the door for a discussion leading to the place of God in the natural world. This is the space where Coakley contributes the most.

Her essay, “Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence” dives into questions about “the seemingly problematic relation of evolutionary processes, as scientifically understood, and the classic Christian doctrine of divine providence”55. As described in the previous section, Coakley emphasizes the reality that the Divine was, is, and will continue to be an active presence in the physical world. She takes for granted God’s activity, but she is also aware of the questions raised about her presuppositions by scientific study. Shying away from

54 Ibid., 5.
55 Ibid., 375.
them would create and contribute to chasms between the understandings of the
natural world held by science and theology. Instead, she wades into the contested
spaces, making claims both about the divine and the natural world. She
established the ways in which God is an active participant in the physical world,
in the lives of human beings. God is not foreign or distant, but an intimate part of
life. The physical world in which God acts is not an illusion or a pure burden.
Instead, it is plays a role deeply knit into the story. Again, Coakley describes the
awareness of God’s intervention as coming only when the divine and the human
and evolutionary align correctly.

Such, indeed, we might hypothesize speculatively, was Christ’s
resurrection, which we call a miracle (or even an ahistorical event) because
it seems, from a natural and scientific perspective, both unaccountable and
random. Yet, from a robustly theological perspective, it might be entirely
natural, the summation indeed of the entire Trinitarian evolution process
and thus its secret key.\(^{56}\)

God is not barging into the natural world, and the natural world does not act as an
obstacle to God’s action. The natural is a part of the story. The altruism found
there is not an arbitrary development of accidental evolution; it leads to the
 pinnacle of creation that is the Incarnation. In Coakley’s view, this order in the
world can only be fully understood in the context of Christ coming as fully God
and fully man. He reaffirmed nature as good by taking it on completely, and
demonstrated perfected altruism through the self-sacrifice of the Crucifixion.

When the necessary connections between the natural world and God are
accepted, space for productive and Spirit-led conversations is created. Coakley’s
work with Nowak on evolution, then, is not a jarring collision of opposing sides

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 380.
but has the chance to be the telling of the story of the created order from all perspectives and disciplines. On Coakley’s view, collaborations between biologists and theologians are no longer incomprehensible but inevitable. The natural world is a part of the theologian’s concerns and narrative.

It is from this space for discussion across perceived gaps that Coakley offered her series for the Gifford Lectures in 2012. These lectures presented her and Nowak’s work on evolution and cooperation, to be sure, but they offered something larger too. She wove biology with theology throughout, culminating in a new account of natural theology. She claimed that natural theologians must work with “a form of practiced dispossession, in the Spirit, to the emergence of a truth which may surprise, inform, or disturb by turns”\(^\text{57}\). This disposition denotes openness to the wisdom to be found in the sciences, recognition that the natural world is not arbitrary or a deceiver but instead an access point for humans to see and move towards God. This specific part of her natural theology can be extended to Coakley’s theology and methodology on the whole. She takes for granted, and arguably joyfully so, the important role that the natural world, including the physical body, plays in the spiritual and theological reality.

In truly Christian form, embodiment and physicality is crucial, and thus connection to scientific fields is essential. As I move forward, the importance of the body will be made even clearer, through the discussions of gender and of technology. Simply stated here, however, Coakley rests and works in the

\(^{57}\) Sarah Coakley, “Reconceiving ‘Natural Theology’: Meaning, Sacrifice and God” (lecture presented at the annual Gifford Lecture Series at University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom, April 17-May 3, 2012).
acceptance of a world created by God, saved by Christ who was incarnate, with life lived in flesh that is not condemned.

To conclude this investigation of Coakley and the physical, I turn to a specific book to investigate some of the contemporary problems surrounding the body. *Powers and Submissions* is her first book exploring gender as a specific point of focus. Though she dives deep into the titular interplay of power and lack thereof, this discussion offers insights into some of Coakley’s key themes regarding the physical body. These are clearest in the concluding essay “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God”. Here, she brings Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great Chalcedonians and a favorite of hers throughout her career, and Judith Butler, the iconic gender theorist, into conversation. She is highly critical of Butler, but also draws from the wisdom there. Butler’s work on gender highlights a discomfort with the nature of bodies and particularly with the interplay between physical body and gender. Quoting *Bodies that Matter*, Coakley describes Butler’s belief that, “there is no access to bodies that is not already gendered access: ‘there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body’”.58 She does not recognize any way to access the physical body separate from cultural influences. Coakley highlights the truth therein, noting the elusiveness of a satisfying definition of what a body actually is, especially without integrating cultural impositions. The pursuit of a definition is further complicated by the intersections of political and cultural forces. The post-modern body is “subject to

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infinitely variable social constructions,” “comes to bear huge, and paradoxical, pressure,” and “becomes infinitely problematized and elusive.”

Coakley, however, reads this not as a condemning problem but a sign pointing towards truth. These anxieties come from an overinflation of the body, important though it may be, as a sort of replacement for meaning otherwise found in religious and philosophic pursuits. This is clear in ritualized attempts to avoid death, mentioned above, thus denying its place in physical life. Instead for Coakley, taking healthy nods from Gregory of Nyssa, locates the body as an important space for growth and transformation, but recognizes that it is not eternal, nor should it be. The hoped for goal and draw to the eternal point humanity to God.

**What Is “Woman”?**

Though theology is Coakley’s core discipline, feminism and gender theory is a crucial piece of her academic puzzle. Given a context in her understanding of the divine and the person, I turn now to her notion of what is means specifically to be a woman. There are a number of ways to approach this topic, but here, I aim to build Coakley’s view on womanhood in stages. First, I will highlight some of the relevant major strains of thought in feminist theory, pointing out both what Coakley criticizes and embraces. In the midst of this, I will continue a line of thought from the previous section, briefly investigating her understanding of women in terms of bodies. Finally, I will approach what I believe Coakley herself would deem the peak, the understanding of women on a theological level. In creating a gradient of her feminist theories, I provide both an entry point for

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59 Ibid., 155.
secular feminism, here specifically cyberfeminism, and show the ways that feminist theology can extend cyberfeminism in a unique and crucial way. This will maintain the project’s theological core without compromising its interdisciplinary sensibilities.

Coakley frequently engages in discussion with Judith Butler. While the previous discussion of Butler highlighted her and Coakley’s conversation of the body, now I will direct my attention specifically to questions of gender and thus I will continue that conversation between Coakley, Butler, and Gregory of Nyssa. Butler’s most notable contribution to the field is her formal introduction of gender presentation and subversion. She presents a cultural landscape dominated by a narrow gender binary, encompassing both biological sex and gendered characteristics, and compulsory heterosexuality. Though ultimately pessimistic, Butler offers a way to rebel against this system: subversion of expected gender presentation. In short, gender presentation describes the willful engagement or rejection of the binary through, for example, physical appearance, clothing, and speech. Butler acknowledges bodily sex characteristics but, as alluded to before, she has trouble settling on satisfactory definitions of body and of its sexual differences. Her focus is instead on presentation, on the ways to engage and attack cultural expectations.

Her work became a rallying cry for many feminists as well as those that felt displaced by the binary system, which pitched limited, restrictive categories and marginalized those who did not fit them. Coakley is not afraid to critique the problematic aspects of Butler’s work, but she is even more courageous in searching for and holding fast to the truth she finds therein. Coakley points to
desire (as she understands) it within Butler’s work, both in her discussions of gender and of sexual orientation. Though Butler herself does not point to this directly, Coakley notes that desire there “always signals a form of ‘loss’, an obscured yearning, an exclusion of possibilities that ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ rules out”\(^\text{60}\). This may appear to be problematic but instead highlights a crucial facet of desire as a part of the human condition. When not directed towards the true aim of God, desire seeks placation in other places and relationships. This is the obscured yearning of which Coakley speaks. Additionally, she acknowledges that culturally constructed gender exists, that binary roles are pervasive and, when used to oppress, are problematic. Fluidity in gender presentation is to be applauded, particularly because it mirrors the views of gender found in ascetical texts.

Here, Gregory of Nyssa steps into the conversation through Coakley’s words. His wisdom offers guidance in understanding physical sex. “[O]riginal creation was of non-sexed (that is, non-genitalized) beings” and “only en route, so to speak, to the Fall, that ‘man’ was distinguished from ‘woman’”\(^\text{61, 62}\) and the eschatological hope is, in part, to return to a non-genitalized state. He additionally contributes to the gender discussion. Binaries are useful for the needs of the more immature, but they are to be left behind as a person grows. Using his work as a compass, Coakley states that the key to understanding gender

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 160.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 163.
\(^{62}\) For a specific example of this idea in Gregory of Nyssa’s work, see Coakley’s discussion of his interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2, including the crucial separating in Genesis 1:27 of “in the image of God he created him” and “male and female he created them” as different actions in *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 281.
is not “to obliterate the binaries that remain culturally normative, but [to seek]... to find a transformative way through them” through “a life-long ascetical programme, a purification and redirection of eros towards the divine”\textsuperscript{63}. In Coakley’s terms, the way to navigate gender roles and presentation is to be guided by properly ordered desire. Though gender plays a part, both bodily and spiritually, in human lives, Gregory does not see it as the primary or definitive identifier. It has an effect on the way humans stand in relation to God and to others, but presentation is still a key space of fluidity and play when guided by desire. This finds no better manifestation then in Gregory’s presentation of his sister, Macrina. She is a female in body and in primary presentation, but as Coakley highlights, his writings have her taking culturally masculine roles and eliciting culturally feminine reactions from him. This fluidity is not a function of a rebellious streak in Macrina but a sign of her properly ordered desire, of her heart primarily pointed toward God.

Macrina serves as a bridge to the theological presentation of gender in Coakley’s work. Her exemplary fluidity, combined with her ascetical practices described by Gregory, demonstrates Coakley’s aspirational ideas for gender. For example, Gregory’s \textit{On the Soul and the Resurrection} presents a conversation between the siblings. Throughout the work, “Gregory takes the part of the passions,” the typically feminine faculty of the body and emotion, “and Macrina manifests the stern rational asceticism in which Gregory manifestly fails,” embodying the masculine faculties of the mind.\textsuperscript{64} Despite the gender switch in

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 165.
the interaction, Gregory does not present either of their gender identities as concretely changed. Instead, the flow of gendered roles offered new opportunities for them both to grow closer to God that would not have been available without their fluidity.

Problematically, God has been identified throughout Christian history in masculine terms, along the higher faculties of the mind, and the earthly Church and body have been described in feminine terms. When these distinctions are assumed to reflect inherent characteristics, as they have for so long, men are thought to be naturally superior to women. This is obviously toxic and problematic, and Coakley addresses it through her understandings of desire and relationship founded in the image of God, and the fluidity found in ascetic practices.

I introduced Coakley’s understanding of desire before and will delve deeper into it now. Coakley states that in humans, desire is more fundamental than gender and even biological sex. It is, as discussed, a result of humanity’s creation in God’s image, an echo of “that plenitude of longing love that God has for God’s own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, Trinitarian, life”\(^{65}\). In turn, God provides the way to connect desire to gender. “[T]he key to the secular riddle of gender,” Coakley says, “can lie only in its connection to the doctrine of a Trinitarian God”\(^{66}\). To explain this, it is necessary to understand the relationships essential to the nature of God. There is a twoness at the core of God, characterized by the relationship between God and humans. It

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\(^{66}\) Ibid., 52.
is a relationship of disparate power with constant and perfect offering of love from God and sporadic and imperfect response from humanity. More essential, however, is the Threeness in God. The interplay of Trinity, a continual exchange of love tied together without straying or severing, is perhaps the truest characteristic of God. Ultimately, twoness is completely eclipsed by Threeness in the life of God. If then, as Coakley argues, gender is a facet of the image of God in humans, then this Threeness must be at play. Gender understood simply in twoness mirrors an incomplete understanding of God and, practically, perpetuates oppressive cultural systems. However, “[i]t is the very threeness of God... transformatively met in the Spirit, which gives the key to a view of gender that is appropriately founded in bodily practices of prayer.” With desire properly directed towards God, space for the Spirit is created. Instead of a limited binary, gender becomes an interplay of love between humans with the necessary and welcome presence of God. It serves to orient all genders ultimately to God. Simply put, “it is about differentiated, embodied relationship – first and foremost to God, but also to others.”

Gender founded in Threeness must not be restricted to binary genders in relation to each other and God. Coakley deems fluidity key to the definition because fluidity creates the space for the Holy Spirit.

... This is not, I must emphasize, a theory of a "third gender," much less a theory either of the insignificance, or the obliteration, of gender. On the contrary, it is a theory about gender’s mysterious and plastic openness to divine transfiguration.

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67 Ibid., 34.
68 Ibid., 53.
69 Ibid., 58.
Fluidity, or plasticity as she calls it here, is necessary for the Spirit to be present and a strict adherence to a restrictive binary does not leave room for that movement.

Coakley doesn’t refute the idea of cultural gender roles, and while it is unclear whether she sees a distinction between natural and constructed ones, she espouses the importance of subverting and utilizing them in Christian practice. For example, there is a perception of emotion and a higher capacity to love as feminine traits. These are not limited to women, however, and in the ascetic context, emotional exploration and growth in love are readily practiced by men as well as women. Fortunately, this interplay of gender in a Trinitarian context is not limited to ascetics. They instead models the exploratory space that should be aimed for by Christians engaged with their own gender and the manifestation of gender at large in the world and in God.

**Technology and the Changing World**

The challenge of the analysis of Haraway’s work was extrapolating the theological notions from her work; I have now arrived at the challenge in Coakley. She covers a wide range of topics in her work, but there is no explicit discussion of technology to be found. Thus, I have the task of reading between her lines to develop a rough sketch of her technological understanding. This will again serve to find similar footing between Coakley and Haraway, and help to keep my final evaluations on track to authentically reflect Coakley’s contributions to the synthesis.

To get at Coakley’s stance on technology, I will be returning to well-trodden ground. First, I will turn to her work with evolutionary biology. While
her partnership with Nowak and her lectures give primarily a number of insights into her views on the physical world and the body, they also have something to say about the way that she faces the progressing world. I will attempt to infer some things from that work. For forming the bulk of this section’s analysis, I will take a more abstract approach. I discussed Coakley’s eschatology previously, as well her views on evolution. Though specifically directed toward theology and biology respectively, I intend to pull from these two a more general philosophy and apply it to the conundrum (or blessing, given the context) of technological progress. Together, these will not necessarily give a complete picture of Coakley’s philosophy or theology of technology, but it will give a sufficient foundation to facilitate the conversation.

I begin with the concrete scientific work. It may seem incongruent for a theologian, particularly one who focuses largely in patristics, to dig into the most contemporary evolutionary biology. There is certainly a perception of science as a progressive discipline and theology as a regressive one. Coakley’s involvement, however, demonstrates one of the ways in which these disparate fields can comfortably sit together. This is possible thanks in large part to the way that Coakley approaches the world with her theology. Recall her théologie totale. This approach is necessarily adaptable and playfully unstable, and values the integration of fringe and outside sources alongside the most cherished ones. This translates logically into Coakley’s orientation of openness towards integrating contemporary science, with all the physical technology and theoretical innovation that it brings. The théologie’s perspective calls for curiosity and credit at the least in the perspective of alternative sources.
There are additional clues to Coakley’s stance on technology in her eschatology. Life is oriented in pursuit of God, directed in earthly life through desire. This desire leads to growth in humans’ relationships with the divine, as it leads them closer to God, and with other humans, as they are drawn to the image of God in each other and as they help lift each other closer to God. Granting this perspective, I believe I can infer a significant piece of the Coakley’s potential technological puzzle. If the focus of life is progression closer to God, with relationships with others as an important aspect, then technology at its best should serve one of those purposes. If it facilitates a better relationship with God (like an app that makes prayers more accessible to more people) or with others (like a social networking platform operating optimally), then it should be explored. After deeper reflection, it may need to be rejected, but it is still due attention. If the technology does not benefit either relationship or worse, severs either of them, then it should certainly be regarded with caution if not rejected outright. This disposition, I believe, will facilitate fruitful conversation with Haraway. Though appearing to be different on a surface level, this chapter has highlighted the potential space to be shared between the women, as well as the other wisdom that Coakley’s theological position brings to the discussion. With an understanding of the interlocutors’ stances established, I can now move forward to the exciting challenge of synthesis toward a cyberfeminist theology.
CHAPTER 4
SYNTHESIZING A CYBERFEMINIST THEOLOGY

This project is now approaching its conclusion. The previous chapters gave careful attention to the two interlocutors, drawing out the relevant facets of their thought and attempting to construct the positions they bring to the discussion. Grounded in an understanding of their ideas, that discussion can begin. In this final chapter, I will attempt to synthesize the work of Donna Haraway and Sarah Coakley into a preliminary construction of a cyberfeminist theology. I have been affectionately referring to this chapter as “play with intellectual Legos”. There are a varied number of pieces on the floor in front of me. My ambition is not to design and execute a perfect, lasting structure to bear a great deal of weight. Instead, I am picking up pieces, examining them, and testing them to see how they fit together. The results of this project, I contend, are not useless or invalid but instead an act of Spirit-led experiment that has potential to be very fruitful. I will begin this synthesis by restating the larger and the more specific questions at task and declaring the method of the chapter. From there, I will describe the constituent parts of this prospective cyberfeminist theology, utilizing both the components of the term itself and the themes developed through the chapters. Here, I will tie in the scholars’ individual ideas. Finally, I will offer a summation of my synthesis, as well as questions to guide further pursuit in this direction.
The core question of this project is fairly simple: is it possible to have a cyberfeminist theology? This relates to the questions of “whether” and “why” we might need a cyberfeminist theology to begin with. My answer is that a cyberfeminist theology is needed because it flows out of questions of how Christians ought to help the marginalized and silenced (which, unfortunately, refers to women in too many cases) and whether God can be found in the world and particularly outside of the sanctuary. The shadowy idea of a cyberfeminist theology has potential to address concerns in all these questions because it covers the necessary bases in new and creative ways. Technology holds great potential to uplift, empower, amplify, and serve. These are just the sorts of goals that Christians have when approaching the margins. This specific integration is especially useful because it is respectful. It acknowledges that different tools must be used in different ways to address different problems. This may seem simple, but the temptation to homogenize is very real. Respecting individuality avoids dehumanizing those in need. Cyberfeminist theology could certainly be more specific, but it does provide a narrower focus than most. Thus, this project seeks to shed some light on the shadows, to initiate play and exploration in a new space. In relation to answering these questions, we turn to my interlocutors: What can theology (here, Coakley) gain from study of cyberfeminism (here, Haraway)? Are there aspects worth appropriating?

To answer these questions, my conclusion will integrate the method used in the previous chapters while bringing it to its intended conclusions. I established in the introduction five core themes that I believed would be crucial to cyberfeminist theology: interdisciplinary approach, the body and the physical
world, understanding womanhood, the role of the enchanted and the sacred, and technology and the changing world. These themes offer space in which to compare and contrast the scholars, looking for places fertile for construction and growth. Here, I will gather these themes again and knit them together under the eponymous disciplines of this project: theology, feminism, and cybertechnology. This project prioritizes the disciplines in that order, prizing theology first and foremost. I believe it is important to admit here that this project is constructed with a definite bias towards the approach of Coakley’s théologie totale. Christian theology is the ultimate purpose, to be sure, but the wisdom and presence of the Holy Spirit in other disciplines, especially those on the fringes, should be sought with openness and curiosity. Coakley’s influence on me in this project is clear and this project explores and embraces cyberfeminism with the same disposition.

Theology

Now, I will address the constituent parts of a cyberfeminist theology. As stated before, the highest priority is the theology. I refuse to sacrifice any theological integrity for the sake of any applied cyberfeminist principles. To address this crucial facet, I will draw primarily from the theme of enchantment and the sacred, with nods to the bodily, gender, and technological themes as well. Coakley will obviously have the most to contribute here, but I will not neglect Haraway’s perspective. Some of her inclusions in this section may seem to be auxiliary and perhaps even arbitrary, but her commentary on Coakley’s offerings is important to keep in mind.

Above all, as is clear thus far, the biggest theological claim taken from my interlocutors is Coakley’s théologie totale. This theological framework is
necessary for the project to work. It holds God as the core constant, understanding that the Holy Spirit actively participates and guides the world today as It has through the centuries. It is unendingly curious and open to the ideas and people on the fringes. Its results are exploratory and malleable, not untouchable statements of absolute truth. It ebbs and flows with the input it gathers, allowing the breath of the Spirit to push it in different and important directions. This system provides the project’s guiding principles; I follow by its example. Though théologie totale stems from Coakley, Haraway’s work mimics its motions. She too does not confine herself in rigid disciplines and unassailable conclusions. She explores the wisdom offered by others, weaving myths and metaphors with a sense of play that feels completely at home in the théologie. It is from this shared disposition, in fact, that cyberfeminism itself was born. It could be argued that some aspects of the théologie mimic parts of the cyborg: in recognition of the complexity of the world and in rejection of restricting categories, the cyborg desires noise and chaos over order. Disorder allows for all voices to be heard and creates space for authentic fluidity. The cyborg and the théologie do not take their declarations to be any concrete gospel, and they value flexibility and play.

To execute the théologie, this project is best-suited adopting Coakley’s contemplative disposition as well. Approaching the world contemplatively acknowledges the motion of the Holy Spirit, but recognizes that It acts in a process of collaboration and relationship. Contemplation is a conscious exploration of the space inhabited by God in a given situation. It is prayer, performed rationally and with abandon. It is the tool that keeps the théologie’s
malleability from rendering any insights completely useless and aimless. The flexibility allows accessible space for the insights gained in contemplative prayer. It will help keep this cyberfeminist theology in line not with human desires and whims but with the motions of God, which prevents flawed humanity from steering the project away from the Divine, the ultimate priority and goal for theology. The required humility maintains the disposition that the theology is first, that there is no facet worth sacrificing the space occupied by God. Haraway, it should be clear, does not approach the world or her work through contemplation. This addition, however, allows for the prudent examination and appropriation from her work into this new theological subfield.

There is one other major gift given by Coakley to this project. While dissecting gender, Coakley forwards a deeper and primary part of humanity: desire. Human desire mirrors the dynamic of the Trinity. It is at its core a desire for relationship with God. It manifests, however, through relationships with others. Gender, traced back as a post-lapsarian reality, is subsumed under the fundamental desire in human hearts. Dealing with this desire in a healthy and holy way is contingent on building proper relationships. The primary relationship, of course, is that with God. Secondary, but still crucial, are relationships between other people. Rather than exploitation stemming from misplaced desires, rather than carving distance and othering groups of people, these right relationships must be ordered around desire. Relationships with others ought to point to God and bring the parties involved closer to God. These definitions of desire and of relationship are vague as they are to be hermeneutics rather than rigid rules. This allows for the théologie’s required space for the
Spirit. This is, again, by no means the disposition with which Haraway views the world but I believe that she would not actively reject it. This desire-based model for relationship is oriented towards a God that she does not recognize as existing, but the ends it aims for would be palatable. The resulting relationships would refuse to be built on exploitation or the wielding of power. They would stand on foundations of concern for the other and especially the othered, a stance that I believe Haraway would be sympathetic toward, and they recognize the potential in technology to solve these concerns in new, innovative ways.

This all is not to say, however, that the only space for Haraway in the theological side of this project is in theoretical acceptance or rejection of Coakley’s ideas. Much of her utility here is as a counterbalance and as the unexpected creator of paths. Recall that Haraway is an avowed atheist with a strong distaste for Catholicism. While this may seem at first to make her integration impossible, I argue that instead that a space has been inadvertently carved for the Holy Spirit to enter. Her work does not go to great length to disavow God and religion; in fact, the absence of the divine is taken for granted. Even with her atheistic disposition, religious imagery is used throughout. She writes in a world where God is not recognized, but lived religious experience is. These images retain a thread of connection, giving God at least the metaphysical space for potential existence. The goal here then is to subvert Haraway’s theological assumptions, to open her work up to experiencing God is a more direct and real way, similar to the way Coakley writes about gender theorist Judith Butler. It is respectful and curious, but it is not afraid to dig for the useful and leave behind the problematic. Additionally, this divinity is not the rigid,
spiteful God that drove Haraway away from the Church; it is the dynamic God full of desire and love on which Coakley focuses. This divine space is not foreign to Haraway and I believe that the conversation there required for cyberfeminist theology is deeply possible.

Where does this theological survey leave the project? It is by no means complete, but it has presented two key metrics. First, the divine in the world is a God who is involved, concerned, and full of love. God is not silent, nor distant. Personal relationship with God is meant to be the standard. Second, it seems that the strengthening of relationships is the obvious goal. These relationships are all between God and humans at their core, as human relationships are just reflections of that desire for God that are best when directing the other towards God. Human relationships, however, are easier to examine and evaluate, so they will form an important part of the metric. Effects on the health of relationships, whether improved or marred, are a useful way to discern new offerings to the Christian life.

**Feminism**

Once grounded in theology, the next necessary piece of this project is the feminism. Compelled by relationship with the divine, concern should be directed towards those most in need, those who are oppressed and on the margins. In the midst of a patriarchal society, the female half of the population experiences varying levels of oppression. Experiencing life as a woman tends to present a great deal more challenges than the experience of being a man. Just as Jesus reached out to women throughout the Gospels, so too are Christians to reach past gendered boundaries and offer a hand to women. This essentially outlines a
theological feminism that takes its cues from God rather than an equality-focused humanist model. In execution, theological feminism does not ignore the wisdom or progress gained by secular feminism, but instead treats them as inspiration and critically evaluates them to be reclaimed or rejected. This describes the feminist work that Coakley has done, as well as the work that I plan to do here. To make these evaluations, I will draw primarily from my gender theme, but will also keep in mind the efforts in the sacred and bodily themes.

I first revisit Coakley’s impression of gender subsumed under and ordered by desire. She claims that desire is fundamental and that the health of relationships between humans is determined by the positive or negative manifestation of their inmost desires. In this conception of the world, gender, especially as a binary, is not the ultimate reality of humanity, nor is it to be completely rejected. Coakley instead proposes that the binary should be kept as a metric to be used for the spiritually immature. After growth, however, the spiritually engaged and mature are to seek ways through the binary and live with the gender fluidity that mimics the eschatological hope for Heaven. She is realistic in her understanding that the world is experienced in a different way by women and that those differences must be attended to. Following the example of Jesus and of the Patristic and Contemplative writers that she holds in high esteem, she magnifies the voices, struggles, and wisdom of the women pushed to the margins.

Haraway proposes a different conception of gender, but many traits are shared with Coakley’s. Her understanding of the metaphysical reality of gender is murky, tempered by the influences of her biological knowledge as well as the
knowledge and wisdom gained from secular feminism. Her proposed cyborg lives outside of rigid gender distinctions, exists in a world where the lines of gender are blurred if not completely erased. Machine integration in human lives helps to render the limitations of bodies, here specifically of gender, superfluous in a chaotic and free future. The cyborg is only in its infancy now, and thus the reality of the world today is not one free from inequality and oppression. Women experience the world in a different way, a way that is disadvantaged and marginalized. Gender is not the only factor, however. Intersectionality is key for Haraway. Just as gender moderates the experience of the world, factors like race and socioeconomic class have influence and can cause great struggle for those who are on the fringes. Though Haraway’s work is explicitly feminist, it is not solely concerned with women. It recognizes the crucial intersections and aims to meet the needs there.

Ultimately, the primary shared space between these two views is the concern for the needs of women in a world that frequently wields power against them and casts them aside. The reality found in the gender binary is at odds between them, but this project claims ideas from both. There is hope that the gender distinctions that drive wedges between humans will fall away when the relationships with God are fulfilled. For now, though, the world at hand is plagued with power disparities that operate patriarchylly. The scholars also agree that there is merit to gender fluidity. Though Coakley sees it as a spiritual tool to grow closer to God and Haraway understands it as a step towards the dissolving of gender boundaries facilitated by technological integration, both recognize the power in subverting gendered roles.
Both these spaces of agreement are important to the conclusions of this project. Gender is not rigid or formalized and a sense of play within its roles moves wisdom and knowledge forward. Modern cultures have forced women into the margins. The Christian call to care for those on the fringes means that particular attention and care is needed to combat the sexist oppression they face. For this project to claim to be theological and feminist, these two realities must be taken into account. I return, then, to the scaffolding of a metric established in the previous section. Establishing and maintaining human relationships to God and to each other is the goal. Service to these relationships is, then, the test. To be feminist, this metric must be clear about its care and concern for women. The relationships between women, between women and men, and most crucially between women and God face particular challenges. My view of a cyberfeminist theology considers it imperative to act and evaluate with a mind compassionate to these challenges. For example, any male relationships, whether with each other or with God, that even indirectly disregard or harm women must be critiqued and changed. Men whose privilege affords them access to education and new forms of technology should direct their resources to women who lack those opportunities with a charitable heart.

**Cybertechnology**

I have fleshed out the theological and feminist sides of this project. The time has now come to address the most challenging addition, that of cybertechnology. Feminist theology, though a relatively younger field of study, is a well-explored space. Cybertheology does not have the benefit of this foundation of experience and knowledge. Some have dealt theologically with progressions in
technology, with the role of new offerings like the internet, and with the progression of science. My project is not completely novel but it does attempt to travel paths that are not yet well trod. I outline this now as a sort of disclaimer. I walk into this space with the sense of play that the théologie totale employs and values so greatly. I take cues from Coakley, setting a theology that aims to be unstable with plenty of space left open for the movements of the Holy Spirit. I also find it important at the beginning of this section to revisit the intentions that began this project. I do not explore the intersections of technology and feminism within theology as an arbitrary project. I stand with Coakley and Haraway in their desire to hold up and help women. I do not reject or fear the technological and scientific advancements; I am inclined instead to see these developments as gifts and to look for where the Holy Spirit dwells or may dwell in them. Technology has the ability to be a great tool or a great burden for work toward equality. It is this project’s hope to cultivate technology as a tool and reroute it as a burden while exploring creative solutions to the problems of sexism.

To begin, Haraway is deeply optimistic about the potential found in technology. The progression forward is inevitable in her eyes; humans have been melding with machines for centuries. The present question then becomes how to handle the advancing world. To this end, she proposes cyborgs. Openly and optimistically integrate machines and humans, she counsels, and live into the chaos that ensues. Attempts at organization and sorting create unnecessary

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70 This project is fortunate enough to boast two readers who have published on cybertheological questions. For their examples, see God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age by Brad J. Kallenberg and Aquinas on the Web?: Doing Theology in an Internet Age by Jana Marguerite Bennett.
constraints and, therefore, problems rather than unity. She sees cyborgs as a remedy to these restricting formalities, particularly for women who are deeply oppressed by the limited gender binary. Rather than attempting to shoehorn humans by perceived categories of experiences, the cyborg ideal allows for authentic representation. The telos of this ideal, so far as I can tell, is the human mastery of the world, integrating the so-called natural with the manufactured. There is no space for submission to anything but the representative disorder that follows. However, even this telos appears to be incomplete. Perhaps it is that ultimate mastery; perhaps it is the elimination of the disparities of power. There seems to be direction in Haraway’s cyberfeminism but it appears to some degree that it is unsure of its further reaching goals.

What, then, can be taken from Haraway? To begin sorting that out, I believe it is most useful to point to the problems, that which must be set aside and that which must be repaired. There are aspects of her cyberfeminism incompatible with theology, to be sure. The lack of telos is a problem just as a steering a boat without a compass is a problem. Motion can surely happen but, with no clear sense of direction or orientation, any meager progress made is random and inefficient. The telos provides a horizon for direction and in this project, it is important that on that horizon is God. Haraway’s lack of telos is an issue that is created by the atheism at the core of her work. Her vision of technological progress is moving toward an unnamed space with no place for God. This must be addressed.

Additionally, her desire for chaos is also problematic. Unity is at the heart of the Christian message and Coakley’s hope for the proper ordering of desire and
for relationships demonstrates this. Disorder as freedom is contrary to the Christian disposition and if cyberfeminist theology is to be an authentic expression of Christian theology, it cannot allow this to stand. Finally, her criteria, thin as it appears, for evaluating the technology integrating with humans cannot stand. There must be more consideration applied, shaped by the renewed telos and the desire for unity.

I think that her optimism for the future is worth claiming because it keeps potentialities from being unduely rejected before they get the investigate they deserve. If theologians aim to do more than pontificate from on high, if they aim to serve the Christian family in their work, then some fraction of time and energy must be directed towards addressing the realities and their issues facing the contemporary world. Haraway is correct in her assessment that cyborg-like transformations have been happening for quite some time and show no sign of stopping. If the development of human knowledge of the world is viewed as a gift, then this technological movement can be viewed as a potential space for the Spirit to move. Coakley’s identification with the sciences and work to collaborate rather than reject is reflective of this optimism.

Additionally, her desire to care for the margins, to destroy restricting chains and eliminate the cruel wielding of power, is crucial. It is necessary facet of compatibility with the Christian disposition in this project. Haraway’s specific method is questionable, to be sure. Chaos has no place as a goal in cyberfeminist theology, but the desire to care for the least of these woven deeply into Haraway’s work is a gift to this project.
As mentioned, Haraway’s telos, insofar as it actually exists, is directed completely away from God. Again, for this project to be authentically theological, the direction away from God must be changed. Coakley’s understanding of desire is useful for this rerouting. Human desire, mirroring that in play within the Trinity, orders relationships and drives the heart to actions. It can lead humans astray when disordered, but when properly directed, it provides the foundation for healthy relationships. It acts as a deeply seeded compass, directing humanity closer to God. This compass will be adopted in the synthesis of this project and its direction will save the synthesis from being guided away by the atheistic influence presented by Haraway.

Ultimately, cybertechnology brings something different to this project than theology and feminism do. The latter two give context, criteria for evaluation, and the deepest priorities for the project. The former offers a disposition of optimism, certainly, but its ultimate offering is of a subject. Cybertechnology is the space of exploration, that which must be evaluated. This cyberfeminist theology is, ultimately, a permutation of feminist theology, distinctive through its focus on technology. Therefore, this section brings the metric developed above into focus. Technologies are measured against the relationships, human and divine, they touch. What effects do they have? How particularly do they effect women? This is the space that cyberfeminism inhabits and the questions it asks.

Conclusions and Questions

I have finally arrived at the conclusion of this project, the end of this winding intellectual road. It is then time to draw my work to a close and prepare
for the journeys to come. Finally, I will trace what I consider to be the most pressing questions going forward. There will be no easy solution or answer in this conclusion. I have the théologie totale’s inherent instability and flexibility to thank for that. In fact, the ultimate hope within this project is not to give final, definite solutions and definitions but to prompt thoughtful and spirit-led conversations in a space I find to be both interesting and necessary to explore.

To begin, I return to my interlocutors for the final time. Coakley has proven to be the main context for this project. Her wisdom and theological ideas have provided me with the necessary foundations to move forward. She does not speak for the totality of theological study, nor should she be expected to, but her approach has been crucial for this work. She is open to outside wisdom, a fact amplified by the trust she has in the guidance from the Holy Spirit gained through contemplation. Her théologie totale is a framework that lends itself well to this exploratory construction. She works with gender and is in many ways a feminist theologian. She is also a theologian concerned with the gifts to be found in technological and progressive fields. In short, she is one of the best possible interlocutors for this project.

Simplistically speaking, Haraway offers cyberfeminism to the project. I believe that specifically, and with a greater sense of charity, she brings four other major gifts to the table. First, she provides a rich well of wisdom from the fringes that the théologie values. Her work is not the result of a dull or idle intellect. It has a great deal to offer. Second, Haraway’s voice is a resonant advocate for the problems that press upon contemporary culture. Her work is concerned with the complex issues that, whether ignored or not, have an effect on the world.
Technology continuously grows and the relationship between humans and machines becomes more and more complex. Haraway points us to this reality. She asks many of the same questions that theology asks, though for different reasons, and is useful to situate our work. Thirdly, she amplifies the feminist concerns that Coakley offers. Their feminism may appear to differ in many ways but their questioning of rigid gender binaries and their concern for the reality of life experiences as a woman is shared. Finally, she prizes play and exploration in a way that is supportive on the théologie’s disposition. Her work also rejoices in malleability, draws from many sources, and explores shadowy places with curiosity rather than condemnation and fear. She may not admit to hold the théologie herself but I have worked to make it clear that much is shared between them.

The synthesis in this project has resulted not in concrete assertions, but instead in questions as tools for moving forward. These questions are not idle pursuits of curiosity but instead act as a metric for evaluation of parts of this world. When applied to the specific subject at hand, they provide the parameters for a cyberfeminist theology. They establish what space it occupies and guide its pursuits. They do not appear to be complicated, but the simple words contain a great deal of depth. Their preoccupations carve space for discussion and they offer a way through the ever-changing contemporary world.

First, does technology, whether specific instances or technology on the whole, serve to build human relationships with God and between each other?71

71 I am not the only scholar to ask these questions. For example, I point again to Kallenberg’s God and Gadgets; there he raised similar questions, though with a
More importantly, how does this technology affect the relationships held by women? If it contributes positively, then it is worth evaluating further in a spirit of contemplation. Wisdom may be found there and it may have a place. If its effect is neutral, then it must be challenged honestly. If it provides no effect either way, why does it exist? Why must it continue to be given attention and used? If it hurts relationships, then a defense for the technology's presence would be hard fought. Condemnation is likely in its near future. While evaluating, it is important to remember this project understands healthy relationships as existing to draw the participants closer to God. If a technology seems to serve only relationships with God while driving wedges between humans, then it does not meet the metric’s requirements.

As this project draws to a close, and in the spirit of my inquisitive conclusion, I will raise the questions I find relevant for cyberfeminist theology moving forward. First, it would be useful to investigate the way that my conclusions fit with specifically Catholic theology. Does the Catholic Church and her theologians have more or contradictory things to offer? This too will test the integrity of my conclusions. Additionally, it is worth investigating whether this system, applied to a different marginalized group, may offer a way to navigate new technologies that benefit more than just women. The final questions that are raised rest in the execution of my conclusions. How does it work when used to evaluate the technologies that have become so pervasive in human lives? It is my different method and with more general, rather than feminist, concerns. I read this book very early in my research and his work colored my background throughout.
sincere hope that these questions will be pursued with a prayerful heart and a spirit of curiosity in addition to a keen mind.
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