Violent Inclinations

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Abstract

A new road that Mennonites should consider in responding to the problem of technology runs through the philosophy of technology, media studies, and the 'posthumanities.' The author surveys work by David Wills, Adriana Cavarero, and Thomas Moynihan – scholars who dispute the notion that technological tools are morally neutral and contend that technologies both conceal, and incline us toward, politically saturated and value-laden ends. Concepts discussed include dorsality, spinal catastrophism, uprightness, inclination, and Mennonite ethics. Drawing on J. Lawrence Burkholder's rejection of moderation in favor of the excess of love and ex-Mennonite Grace Jantzen's critique of violence, the author offers an Anabaptist-Mennonite response to Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan that places the problem of technology close to the problem of violence—and challenges the assumption that humanity stands safely apart from technology.

Introduction

While Mennonite responses to the problem of technology may come from the perspective of Christian theology or from technicians or practitioners in STEM fields or industry, one road not taken by Mennonites runs through the philosophy of technology and the emerging fields of media studies and the 'posthumanities.' This is the path I take below while tracing deep connections between humanity, technology, ethics, and violence.

In roughly the past twenty years, thinkers who situate themselves between the study of literature, science, and the arts have suggested that technology is not as separate from humanity as modern thinking would lead us to believe. Drawing on the foundational work of technology theorists like Ernst Kapp, who argued that tools like the axe were prosthetic

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"organ extensions" of human body parts like the arm,[1] recent work in the interdisciplinary humanities has taken a "posthuman" turn that resists assuming that the category of the "human" should be the dominant point of reference in relation to "technology" and "animality."[2] For example, in the 1990s French philosopher Bernard Stiegler undertook a multivolume project called *Technics and Time,* which sees technology and humanity as being deeply intertwined in a process he called "the invention of the human."[3] For Stiegler, the invention of the human implies both that humans invent technology and that technology has inventive and formative effects on humanity, and furthermore that there can be no pure separation of the two categories.

Rather than simplistically dividing the "human" user from the neutral or instrumental domain of tools and "technology," several thinkers taking the posthuman turn now consider the human body itself to be profoundly technological, especially because the body is already involved in the activities of *techne*, craft, and making, well before external tools arrive on the scene. Below I survey three exemplary figures in this liminal philosophical discourse who— seemingly unbeknownst to each other—have shown how technology is related to the ethics of inclination: David Wills, Adriana Cavarero, and Thomas Moynihan. The survey will show how each thinker shares a concern for how technology cannot be separated from the human body and its many inclinations. Following an analysis of how each thinker understands humanity and technology to be inextricably intertwined, I provide one Anabaptist Mennonite response to their work that places the problems of technology close to the problems of violence. Overall, I seek to challenge the notion that humanity stands safely apart from technology,

[1] Ernst Kapp, *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture*. Ed. Jeffrey West Kirkwood and Leif Weatherby. Trans. Lauren K. Wolfe (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2018 [original 1877]).

[2] Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010). Wolfe writes that posthumanism "comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools…" (xv).

[3] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1. The Fault of Epimetheus.* Trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), Part 1.

and this entails rethinking established definitions of technology that contrast it with humanity. Definitions that rest upon instrumental divisions between means and ends or causes and effects, where the human being uses technological tools that are morally neutral, are exactly what these three thinkers are disputing when they explore how technologies both conceal, and incline us toward, politically saturated and value-laden ends.

Dorsality

David Wills situates his work in a "technological turn" that is really a "turn into a technology that was always there."[4] By playing with the resonances of terms like 'turning back,' Wills disputes the notion that technology is defined by novelty and suggests instead that it is the human spinal column or characteristic of "dorsality" that is the original technology. The articulations, twists, and turns of the spine are movements that Wills understands to be deeply technological. Defining the human as "a someone who turns," he argues that "there is technology as soon as there are limbs, as soon as there is bending of those limbs, as soon as there is any articulation at all."[5] Lest we worry that Wills is engaging in a semantic bait-and-switch where a pre-existing and stable definition of technology is changed to suit his purposes, we should note that his argument hinges on the idea that the word 'technology' refers to very concrete acts of crafting and making that cannot be adequately theorized by separating a neutral tool from the human user.

> As soon as there is articulation, the human has rounded the technological bend, the technological turn has occurred, and there is no more simple human. Which for all intents and purposes means there never was any simple human.[6]

Wills argues against the notion that there is an original humanity upon which technology is imposed or from which it is extended. Rather than thinking about humanity and technology as separate categories that come into contact with each other and require moderate forms of mediation, "we should think technology beyond the confines of a human-mechanical

[4] David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

relation" and instead as a "bending outside itself deep within itself."[7] Throughout the rest of his complex and layered exploration of literary and philosophical texts from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jacques Derrida, Wills traces a history of dorsality as "that which, from behind, from or in the back of the human, turns (it) into something technological" and in so doing points to departures, deviations, divergences, and differences from the image of a straight and narrow path.[8]

Although Wills's work is significantly richer and more layered than I can account for in this article, I can gesture toward the ways that Wills rejects simple definitions of technology that would categorically separate human nature from technological tool use. If we follow his inclinations, we can see that the term 'technology' does not name something that begins with the computer or the internet, or even with the stone knife or opposable thumb. Instead, technological forms of crafting, using, and making began with the human body, specifically the spine that allows human beings to bend over and pick up tools, and also allows us to turn back from walking along particular narrative paths between birth and death. For Wills, the term 'technology' points toward the myriad ways that human inclinations become prosthetically extended by both amputating from and adding to the body.[9]

Inclinations

Political resonances within the study of technology and the body grow stronger when we turn to the work of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, whose *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* also focuses on the articulations of the spine and the theme of inclination.[10] Although Cavarero may not initially seem to be a philosopher of technology, we need only apply Wills's insight— that the body's spinal inclinations are never separate from technological acts of crafting and making—in order to see that Cavarero's work on rectitude contributes to the study of technology. Similar to Wills's approach to dorsality, Cavarero argues that the word 'inclination' "points to

[7] Ibid., 4.
[8] Ibid., 4-5.
[9] See David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), 133.
[10] Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*. Trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2016).

a geometrical imaginary" that is both the domain of "an I whose position is straight and vertical" and a confluence of righteousness and rectitude.[11] More clearly than Wills, she argues that the geometrical uprightness of the body has everything to do with ethics. The spine and straight back represent not only a confluence of the human and the technological (Wills), but also a kind of rectitude that seeks to dignify certain behaviors and rectify others (Cavarero), and thereby constructs a normative social habitus that provides members with prescriptive definitions of technology, moderation, and violence.

Throughout *Inclinations*, Cavarero sets forth a "postural ethics" that questions the apprehensiveness about the concept of inclination that traditional philosophers tend to show. She shows how erotic and artistic inclinations are passions that threaten dominant philosophical perspectives which fear the disordering and excessive inclinations of love. She writes that "the most frequent and feared inclination, love, is an attack against the self's balance" and therefore threatens ways of understanding the self that want to keep it in a state of stasis or equilibrium.[12] For her, the concept of inclination is ethically and ontologically significant because it points to how the most basic faculties of human attention are reflected in bodily form.

Throughout her reflections on art, literature, philosophy, and religion, Cavarero rejects patriarchal structures of inclination that desire to regulate women's bodies, and critiques Immanuel Kant's rejection of children despite his notion of inclination (*Neigung*) as affection and desire.[13] Surveying figures as disparate as Virginia Woolf and Plato, Cavarero's work fits loosely within the posthuman turn because she rejects the essential division between human and animal that animates postural ethics. Her basic notion that the problem of the inclination of the body is intertwined with the problems of morality, ethics, attention, and desire is most clearly expressed as she turns from Thomas Hobbes and Elias Canetti to Hannah Arendt and her concept of "natality."[14]

Opposing the idea that mortality defines humanity, Arendt argues that

[11] Ibid., 6.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 22-24, 27-28, 33.
[14] Ibid., 107.

natality— the fact that we are born—should be central to our understanding of the human condition. Rather than focusing on the fact that we will all die, she suggests that our ontological condition of being in the world should remind us that we "are not born in order to die but in order to begin."[15] Arendt attempts to point a way beyond natural labor and productive work, and toward the good life as defined by actions that are not reducible to technological mediation, all while suggesting instead that natality and birth are essential for this kind of *vita activa*. Cavarero's insight is that Arendt owes her conceptions to two Christian ideas—the messianic coming of the Christ child, and Augustine's commentary on creation—and that this lineage is meaningful for political action.[16]

Cavarero shows how refocusing on natality rather than mortality overturns the linear notion that life is defined by a straight line heading toward death. Rather, the act of interrupting such a linear heading with a re-emphasis on birth (natality) reconfigures our inclinations by a miraculous shattering of predictable circularity.[17] Cavarero challenges Arendt's seeming disregard for "mothers, nannies, and children" and sets forth a feminist "Schemata for a Postural Ethics" that argues that "Maternal inclination could work as a module for a different, more disruptive, and revolutionary geometry whose aim is to rethink the very core of community."[18]

Cavarero's feminist ethics of natality relies upon the idea that human inclination is as much about instrumental and technological means and ends as it is about narrative and ontological beginnings and ends. But the relationship between beginnings and ends that mortality and natality represent is not just metaphysically significant; it is historically and temporally significant as well. The narration of a life between the beginning and the end is structured by theopolitical ways of periodizing the time between natality (birth) and mortality (death).[19] How we imagine our bodily and technological inclinations in this interim period often depends upon influential technical

[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 246. Quoted in Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 107.
[16] Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 108-110.
[17] Ibid., 111-12.
[18] Ibid., 120, 131.
[19] For more on theopolitical reconfigurations of origins and ends see the discussion of Grace Jantzen's work below.

terms and images. This connection between the inclinations of the spine and the technological making of history is taken up by Thomas Moynihan, an emerging voice in a new scholarly field called "future studies."[20]

Spinal Catastrophism

In *Spinal Catastrophism: A Secret History*, Moynihan presents a dizzying historical catalogue of analogical connections between the human spine and natural history.[21] Contesting the idea that philosophical genealogies must be linear accounts of reasonable causes and effects, he suggests that instead of classical arguments that rely upon the suspicious unmasking of causes mistaken for reasons, there is another way to think about time and history based on a "hypergenealogy."[22] Rather than thinking about history as being accountable to linearly ordered and reasonable explanations of events, Moynihan wants to re-narrate natural history in a way that privileges making rather than discovering.[23] We ought to "allow thought of the world to become a worldmaker," while asking "What could be more historical than creation?"[24] For him, we do not discover history. We make it.

Moynihan's work rests upon a basic idea seen already in Wills and Cavarero. While revisiting the relationship between planet and person, one of Moynihan's central contentions is that "we are able to orient ourselves upon Earth's mundane sphere only because of *the contingent fact* of our vertical posture, our orthograde backbone."[25] Like Wills and Cavarero, he too considers the spine to be far more important for thinking about technology, ethics, and history than is usually the case. Moynihan's secret history suggests a deep figural connection between the spine, the earth, and the use of tools for human ends. He writes that "the human spine's axis traces a continuation of Earth's own radius" and furthermore that the uprightness of the spine and

[20] See Thomas Moynihan, *X-Risk: How Humanity Discovered Its Own Extinction* (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2020) and the work of Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute (FHI). https://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk.

[21] Thomas Moynihan, *Spinal Catastrophism: A Secret History* (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2019).

[22] Ibid., 6.

[23] Ibid., 7.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 10.

our "ability to exert cognizance and control on a planetary scale results from the same species-specific peculiarity as its [humanity's] susceptibility to back pain."[26] More playful and humorous than many academic texts seeking to understand humanity and technology, Moynihan's book is dedicated to his scoliosis, a joke that if taken seriously can lead us further down the twisted path taken by these three thinkers: the same characteristic that allows human beings to exert technological power over space and time also makes them vulnerable to pain.

This reorientation of the terms of human nature and history leads Moynihan to conclude after much exploration that memory is held in the body and that history is held in objects. These two insights oppose the popular conception that 'technology' refers to neutral tools which reflect and respond to human desires without reciprocal influence. He concludes that "ever since we realised that the universe is one colossal chronometer – and every object an hourglass – the meaning of 'inside' and 'out' has never been the same...."[27] For Moynihan, space and time are not categories that can be abstracted from each other. Instead, they are deeply linked because spatial objects hold time within them. By playing with temporal indicators and mixing past and future tense, he gestures toward the central question that we began with: What should be the relationship between humanity and technology?

For Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan there is no straightforward way of asking this question by dividing humanity and technology in two. These thinkers contend that it is too simple to consider humanity to be the subject and technology to be the object, or to think of humanity as a given and technology as something made. Rephrased, Moynihan's caution is that we do not always know how to divide a human interior from a technological exterior, because the two are always being mediated by spinal means.

Uprightness, Inclination, and Ethics

By disrupting clean dualisms commonly used to think about humanity and technology, and by challenging the desire for a definition of technology that satisfies instrumental desires, the three thinkers surveyed above reveal

[26] Ibid., 10, 13.
[27] Ibid., 283.

something essential about technology and humanity that those in the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition should respond to. Too often theological perspectives on technology remain comfortably within the discipline and do not feel obliged to respond to the claims of philosophical or secular thinkers. Below I attempt to provide one response to these three thinkers that also troubles the distinction between the religious and secular from a Mennonite subject-position.

What unites the works of Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan is not only the notion that the spine is a technological part of the body or that we cannot divide up the world so easily by using the two terms 'humanity' and 'technology,' but also that our dorsality, inclination, and spinality are not morally neutral or reducible to linear and causal relationships between means and ends. It is tempting to think of technologies and tools as merely objects available for use by human beings that come with no pre-given moral orientation. However, if we stop thinking of technology in hard distinction from humanity, we can begin to see that technologies are in fact morally loaded and value laden. Tools and technologies teach us how to use them and they incline us toward forms of both instrumental use and violent abuse.

For evidence of the deep connections between spinal posture, technology, and ethics, we need only look to the work of French historian Georges Vigarello, who clearly traces the historical linkage between physical uprightness and moral rectitude from the sixteenth century onward.[28] The legacies of pedagogy, manners, propriety, and deportment rely upon the idea that posture both reflects and influences morality. We do not even need the connections that Vigarello draws to see the coercive and implicit ways that morality is both reflected and enforced through the regulation of the body. The very notion of propriety is based upon the idea that the physical act of standing up straight is linked with moral uprightness. The problem of posture takes center stage in most attempts—historical and contemporary—to be proper, unoffensive, and upright. Vigarello traces the history of this connection by showing its influence on the 16th-sixteenth century invention

[28] Georges Vigarello, "The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Civility," Trans. Ughetta Lubin, in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Two*. Ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone, 1989). Original: Georges Vigarello, *Le corps redressé: Histoire d'un pouvoir pédagogique* (Paris: Delarge, 1978).

of 'civility,' a term used in our notion of civil society despite its connection with histories of slavery, violence, and colonial rule.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Vigarello argues, posture was a key indicator of moral standing. Citing the stigma associated with the hunched back and the connection between admonitions to sit up straight and the project of western education, he shows that there is no history of the body without a history of epistemology: "Sixteenth-century pedagogy could not avoid the general tendency of that century's epistemology: duplication and similarity. In its proportions the body must evoke relationships that go beyond it."[29] For him, "the body, just like uprightness, is 'caught' in a web of categories dominated by moral expectations."[30]

An Anabaptist-Mennonite Response

How can the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition respond to the problems and questions of technology if, as I am arguing, technology is not separate from =humanity, the body, or morality? Perhaps better! It is easy to think of technology as belonging to an external and instrumental domain that is value-neutral. But if we place technology at a distance, we can easily avoid the ways that tools and technologies both reflect and influence human interests, values, and desires. When we separate a technological exterior from a human interior, tools simply do what we want them to do, and technology is outside us and does not call us to be introspective about human nature and morality. But Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan show that this false division between humanity and technology only obscures how we are already technologically entangled by virtue of having a spine. The moral and ethical stakes of the connection between technological tools and the human body become clearer still when we consider that the history of propriety and deportment is also connected to a violent civilizing process by which some behaviors and peoples were subjected to oppressive postures of slavery and servitude. Calls to be civil, to be upright, and to be righteous are propped up by histories of erect posture and the condemnation and forcible containment of those deemed to be crooked, bent, queer, and so forth.

If the problems of technology cannot be sectioned off into the

[29] Ibid., 154.
[30] Ibid., 157.

domain of neutral tools, and if technology is instead related to how we carry our bodies and what turns we make between birth and death, then an Anabaptist-Mennonite response must consider how these terms are mediated while opposing the violent articulations that have often defined the confluence of technology and humanity. By resituating the problem of technology in relation to bodies and their morally saturated articulations, we can ask our basic question again, but differently: What human-technological articulations and mediations are violent? What violent articulations should we refuse? How can we work toward peace when, as French philosopher Jacques Derrida says, "Violence appears with *articulation*"?[31]

Derrida's provocative assertion should prompt us to consider how pacifist desires to be separate from violence can miss how even the most innocuous inclinations and articulations of the spine contain within themselves both histories and possibilities of violent action. When I refer to violence here, I am thinking not of the typical violations of the body used as exemplars of the concept of violence (like war and murder) but of the norms and values defining the boundaries that are said to be crossed when violence is done. Violence is always defined in relation to value-laden boundaries and their transgression, so what matters for all definitions of violence is what normative boundaries are taken to be violated when violence is done.[32]

However, rather than speak from a theological subject position that would require a very different epistemology from that of my sources above, I will give an Anabaptist-Mennonite response that critiques violence by drawing from the minor philosophical and humanistic tradition within Mennonite thought.[33] Although examples of the humanist strain in Mennonite thinking include Clarence Bauman's combination of Anabaptism

[31] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 147-48.

[32] For a more developed presentation of this perspective on violence, see my dissertation, "Ontologies of Violence: Jacques Derrida, Mennonite Pacifist Epistemology, and Grace M. Jantzen's *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*," Department of Religious Studies, McMaster University, 2021.

[33] See my summary in "Philosophy" in the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Update to the 1989 entry by J. Lawrence Burkholder. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Philosophy (April 2020).

and humanism,[34] Robert Friedmann's existential Anabaptism,[35] J. Lawrence Burkholder's philosophical rejection of moderation in favor of the excess of love, and ex-Mennonite Grace Jantzen's critique of violence, for the sake of brevity I will focus on the latter two voices to articulate a response to the violent articulations within the confluence of technology and humanity.

It is not difficult to see that something is violated, and some violence is done, by the normative prescriptions of uprightness, rectitude, and their straight and narrow path. Rigid pedagogical prescriptions to conduct oneself in an upright manner are part of a long history of rectitudinal righteousness that relies upon the notion that moderation and temperance should restrain the excesses of human nature (including inclinations toward art and the erotic). Furthermore, the desires for clear, stable, and linear definitions of 'humanity' and 'technology' are often based upon severe and austere sensibilities that seek to curb passion and restrain unruly bodies. Although Mennonites are certainly given to the maintenance of communities by appeals to rectitude and righteousness, I now turn to one exceptional Mennonite thinker whose engagement with the philosophical tradition challenges the assumption that uprightness and straight and narrow morality are commensurate with the gospels and Jesus Christ.

In his essay "The Generosity of Love," J. Lawrence Burkholder disputes the Aristotelean notion that the virtuous life is conducted by moderating and mediating between extremes.[36] Burkholder points out that some interpret the writer of Ecclesiastes in this way by arguing that moderation is the meaning of those verses that suggest there is a time for everything. But against Aristotle's "golden mean" and against an interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 as a limitation on excess, Burkholder suggests that there is no biblical basis for living the moderate life that mediates between two stable extremes. Instead, both radical politics and the imitation of Christ demand excessive

[34] See Herb Klassen, "Bauman, Clarence (1928-1995)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Nov. 2005. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Bauman,_Clarence_(1928-1995).

[35] See Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973) and Robert Friedmann, *Design for Living: Regard, Concern, Service, and Love*. Ed. Maxwell Kennel (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

[36] J. Lawrence Burkholder, "The Generosity of Love" in *The Compassionate Community*, ed. H. Ralph Hernley (Scottdale, PA: Association of Mennonite Aid Societies, 1970), 53-54.

and generous forms of love and mutual aid. Contrasting Aristotle's limited and limiting *philia* with the unlimited excess of Christ's *agape*, Burkholder calls his readers to a boundless love that is both the "final norm of Christian ethics" but also something profoundly human.[37] He points to the excesses of giving, forgiving, and hoping, and calls readers to have unreasonable hopes for the future. His faith that "hopes all things" is not bound to existing reasons and facts but instead "penetrates the world of facts to detect and create living possibilities."[38]

Burkholder resists seeing the world as defined by set relations of normativity, and he concludes that "the world is neither a closed system of causality nor a purely human drama of will and flesh and blood ('human all too human')."[39] This places him in continuity with the 'posthuman' thinkers surveyed above, because he opposes forms of mediation that try to take temperate middle-paths between supposedly opposed terms. For Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan important dorsal, rectitudinal, and spinal inclinations challenge simple divisions between humanity and technology. Similarly, Burkholder's refusal of approaches that dignify 'both-sides' or seek a golden mean align him with these thinkers because he refuses to construe his religious and political values as a search for moderation between extremes.

Burkholder considers the world to belong to God and asserts that God "turns the night of despair into the dawn of a new day," but he admits that this kind of hope is "intemperate." Whereas this unbalanced and excessive temperance hopes only in "some things," he argues that love hopes in "all things" while "depending on God."[40] But not all Mennonites have remained within the fold of this hope. For some ex-Mennonites the answer to the regulating demands of rectitude and propriety are too violent to stay within ecclesial bounds. Grace Jantzen, who grew up in a Mennonite Brethren church but later became a Quaker, articulates a different critique of uprightness and rectitudinal righteousness, from outside of the bounds of the Christian church and Mennonite identity—although she retains some admiration for the peace church tradition in her late work.

[37] Ibid., 55.
[38] Ibid., 60.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, 61.

Summarized well in her 2002 article, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," Jantzen's final project *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* explained how violence persists in the common-sense world of the cultural habitus.[41] Her argument, which draws upon Arendt and Cavarero, is that we should refocus our understanding of human nature on natality rather than allow the obsession with death govern our thinking. Rather than define humanity by mortality (that we will all die), Jantzen initiates a careful process of focusing on natality (that we all have been born) without seeking to displace or replace one term with the other. Deeply resonant with the Mennonite commitment to peace and justice, Jantzen challenges Derrida's notion that even the most basic articulations are violent.[42] Her work centers on addressing the roots of violence in our everyday ways of thinking, while planting seeds of peace by emphasizing newness, creativity, birth, and the positive status of difference. She moves beyond Arendt and Cavarero by critiquing the long legacy of violence in the history of the western world. She argues against appeals to human nature that make violence seem natural, normal, and neutral, and does so in a way that, like Burkholder, refuses to simply mediate between established oppositions. For Jantzen, humanity is not defined by either a peaceable or violent nature, and this means that peace and violence are mediated in her work in ways that reject the violent displacement of one term by another. Elsewhere I argue that the unique contribution of her late work lies in her ability to challenge violence without repeating violent patterns of displacement that consider things, concepts, and ideas to exist in zero-sum terms or at the expense of each other.[43] Such a perspective would benefit Mennonite responses to technology—particularly those that see technology as an enemy or other that supposedly threatens to displace theological values.

Like Burkholder, Jantzen does not see either opposition or moderation

[41] Grace M. Jantzen, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 4-19. See also Grace Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*: *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, Vol. I (London: Routledge, 2004); *Violence to Eternity*: *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, Vol. II, ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (London: Routledge, 2009); *A Place of Springs: Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, Vol. III, ed. Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy (London: Routledge, 2010).

[42] Jantzen, *Violence to Eternity*, 24.

[43] See my article, "Violent Displacements," *Angelaki* 27, no. 6 (forthcoming 2022).

between extremes as appropriate goals for those who want to resist violence or work for peace. Against neutral mediations that seek to find something positive in both sides of a political argument, and against polarizing desires to choose sides and defend them, her work is defined by a careful mediation of key terms like 'natality' and 'mortality' through which she refocuses and re-emphasizes our attention to birth and beauty without ignoring the realities of death and violence. Both Jantzen and Burkholder articulate interesting and exceptional Mennonite-related positions that chart a third way apart from either-or ways of thinking. What is exceptional is that they do not take recourse to mediating positions that try to stand in the middle, and they avoid the temptation to synthesize opposing terms or positions in ways that deny their real difference. Instead, Jantzen and Burkholder give indications of an Anabaptist Mennonite humanism that responds to the problems of technology without moderation or displacement.

Conclusion

The histories of humanity and technology are inextricably intertwined. They are not even one entity but multiple and complex. For Wills, dorsality enjoins us to look back and see that we have never been without technology. We cannot put ourselves at a safe analytical distance from technology that would free us from considering human nature in tandem with the problem of technology. For Cavarero, the historical equation of rectitude and righteousness requires a postural ethics that opposes rigid and linear ways of thinking about life narratives between birth and death. Cavarero's inclinations indicate that something is lost when our conception of human life is bound to linear narratives of progress and providence, or circular narratives of habit and routine. Better that our stories would be interrupted by birth, even messianic birth. Moynihan too disputes the assumption that natural history can be explained by linear and teleological narrations of events that cleanly attribute meaning to the past by seeing causes as reasons. His revision of genealogical critique shows that the history of human action relies upon the same reason that we can have back pain: the spinal column. Each thinker surveyed in the first part of this article points to the fact that the catastrophic violence that humanity has wreaked upon itself and the world is not separate from human *techné* and making because we have always made

instrumental and technological use of ourselves and others. The history of the regulation of the body by training the spine to be straight, and the intertwining of rectitude and righteousness, show that the technologies of power used to keep people in line are not different from the technologies of violence used to wage war.

The Mennonite humanism represented by Burkholder and Jantzen opposes the violent inclinations of humanity-technology. Burkholder's excessive love bears a striking resemblance to Cavarero's interruptive love wherein new birth exceeds linear and cyclical visions of time and history. Jantzen's emphasis on natality extends Cavarero's revision of Arendt and refuses to use displacement or linear succession in attempts to solve the problems of violence. Both Burkholder's challenge to moderation and Jantzen's argument for a non-displacing emphasis on natality give key resources for thinking about our violent inclinations, and in closing I draw from their work the following two questions.

First, is moderation the best guide for the use of technology? Many popular approaches suggest engaging with technology in moderation. But if the real problem is not found in mediating between the two stable categories of humanity and technology, but in examining how human-technological confluences and articulations do violence, then perhaps the focus on moderation does not provide what we need. For Mennonites who seek to follow the gospels, Burkholder shows how the excessive love of Christ does not translate into a moderate and conciliatory approach to moral problems that neutrally mediates between extremes or dualisms. Instead, it is all about excessive and generous forms of love that hopes in all things.

Second, are the images of erect posture or the straight and narrow path the best ways to imagine the good life? Given how rectitude and the rhetoric of uprightness have been used to violently coerce people into rigid and codified systems of both religious and secular morality, is it not incumbent upon those who concern themselves with Mennonite life and technological problems to question whether things can or should be made straight?

The history of humanity and technology cannot be told in a straightforward and linear fashion that keeps humanity on one side and technology on the other. Why then should the narration of a life story, and its periodization by theological and political means, rely on linear images

that put life in the service of death by emphasizing mortality at the expense of natality? Perhaps it is time to give up the straight and narrow path and be honest that life is rarely conducted linearly, and furthermore to retire the terminology of uprightness because of its intimations of respectability that avoid the scandalous excesses of Christian love.

In light of the technological insights of Wills, Cavarero, and Moynihan, and in conclusion, I suggest that we may find it instructive to think deeply about the distinctive third ways of Burkholder and Jantzen that mediate between entangled terms; articulate, and extend beyond, the desire for moderation and displacement; and challenge the notion that our humanity and technology can be divided so cleanly.*

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