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# Gnosticism, technology and the soul in Cuarón's *Gravity*

## **Abstract**

Situated within the Digital Age, where technology and science have made life in space possible, Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning space-thriller, *Gravity*, explores critical notions of the relationship between technology and the soul. More specifically, Cuarón's depiction of space voyage illustrates the dualistic approach to the soul in relation to technology, especially the gnostic mind/body split and its manifestation in the Digital Age. This intersection between technology and the soul is a notion of increasingly importance in contemporary society, however it is often evaded in literature. Accordingly, it is crucial to analyze and unpack films, such as *Gravity*, that confront audiences with these concepts, to better understand this relation. In this article I provide a broad overview of gnostic thought, in terms of the soul and dualism, and then situate these gnostic views within the Digital Age and the realm of film. Finally, drawing from these discussions, I then analyze *Gravity* in terms of identified key characteristics, in order to interpret the gnostic relation of technology and the soul in the Digital Age.

## **Keywords**

technology; the soul; Gnosticism; dualism; Digital Age; astronaut; Gravity

## **Author Notes**

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## **Introduction**

Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning *Gravity* (2013) presents the story of a medical engineer (Ryan Stone) and a veteran astronaut (Matt Kowalski) on a routine mission. The astronauts become detached from their shuttle, lose contact with earth and must find a way back home – before their oxygen runs out. Situated within the Digital Age, where technology and science have made life in space possible, the film explores critical notions of the relationship between technology and the soul. More specifically, Cuarón's depiction of space illustrates the dualistic approach to the soul in relation to technology, especially the gnostic mind/body split and its manifestation in the Digital Age. This intersection between technology and the soul is a notion of increasing importance in contemporary society, though it is often evaded in literature.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, it is crucial to analyze and unpack films such as *Gravity* that confront audiences with these concepts, to better understand this relation. In this article I provide a broad overview of gnostic thought, in terms of the soul and dualism, and then situate these gnostic views within the Digital Age and the realm of film. Finally, drawing from these discussions, I then analyze *Gravity* in terms of identified key characteristics, in order to interpret the gnostic relation of technology and the soul in the Digital Age.

## **Gnosticism, the soul and dualistic thought**

Alison Gray (2010) along with Tim Crane (2000), Celia Deane-Drummond (2009) and Roger Scruton (2014) identify dualism as a specific perspective on the soul in contemporary society. In the philosophy of the mind, dualism, stemming from

Platonism, is the view that there are two kinds of substances: physical substance in the form of the body, as well as non-physical substance, in the form of the soul, the mind and consciousness. The pinnacle point of dualism is found in modern western philosopher René Descartes' (1596-1650) philosophy of the 'thinking person.' In his *Meditations* (1641), Descartes proposes that the mind or soul and the corporeal body are two completely distinct substances, but capable of interaction. He constructs the mind or soul as immaterial and spiritual, while the physical body is a simple mechanism. Thus, for Descartes the soul is disembodied.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to substance dualism, dualistic thought also exists in the form of moral dualism. Moral dualism is the belief in the opposition of good and evil, the virtuous and the malicious. The conviction of binary oppositions stems from Judeo-Christian belief, where the creator (God) represents the good in opposition to everything evil (Satan).<sup>3</sup> Therefore dualistic thought usually occurs within a religious or spiritual quest of existence, such as Christianity or Gnosticism.

Broadly defined, Gnosticism refers to a worldview that denies the material world and endorses the spiritual realm.<sup>4</sup> As a philosophical notion, Gnostics are concerned with who human beings are, where they come from and where they are going, in terms of history, as well as spirituality. The perspective stems from the ancient Gnostics, who, during the first two centuries of the Common Era, followed various scriptures and writings in order to teach, understand and achieve knowledge, enlightenment and salvation united with a divine god.<sup>5</sup> From there the use of the Greek word *gnôsis*, which refers to knowledge and insight, became prevalent.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Gnosticism refers to a search for knowledge that is essential to free the self of evil worldly matter, in order to convene with a spiritual sphere.<sup>7</sup>

Simply explained, a gnostic view of being sees the world as clearly divided into two halves.<sup>8</sup> The so-called upper world constitutes the first half and encompasses all that is good and eternal, including god, spirit, supernatural beings and the soul. All of the entities in the upper world are seen as an embodiment of divine perfection.<sup>9</sup> The second half, referred to as the lower world, is the material world consisting of matter, flesh and time. This lower world is said to be created by a supreme being, however it opposes the spiritual upper world, as it is considered to be imperfect, evil and temporary.<sup>10</sup> According to Gnostics, Man is born into the lower world and has to journey to the upper world by gaining knowledge to achieve a being in accord with the spiritual realm. This knowledge is gained by curiously examining philosophy, metaphysics, culture and unanswered questions about the universe. Therefore, gnosis is a seeking journey of spiritual liberation from evil, towards a reunion with divinity.<sup>11</sup>

The dimensions of this gnostic world highlight the above-mentioned crucial part of Gnosticism, namely its 'dual' dualistic nature. This dualism, firstly, refers to a confrontation between two opposing entities or sides – the good versus the evil – that dominates the entire gnostic view.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Gnosticism also applies substance dualism or Cartesian dualism as it clearly distinguishes between the soul and the human body as two distinct entities.<sup>13</sup> The body and earthly matter are seen as the evil prison for the spirit and soul, which has to be set free in the higher (upper) sphere.<sup>14</sup> Therefore Gnosticism is (fittingly) twofold as both moral as well as substance dualism.

With this clear distinction between the spiritual essence and the human flesh the following question comes to light: if the soul is fundamentally seen as a point of interaction between spiritual and worldly matter, where exactly does it reside in the gnostic perspective? For the Gnostics, the soul is part of the divine realm, manifested

within the human being who makes his way from the lower world to the upper world.<sup>15</sup> Singer describes the gnostic soul as follows:

The [*gnostic*] soul is our essential nature. Soul inhabits the truth of their own being, the part that seeks to express itself and to live its own life, the part so often repressed or disregarded as we go about our practical lives making our practical decisions for the sake of expediency. The soul is that part of us, which we most often betray, yet she never ceases in her struggle to be heard, to be attended to, to be redeemed. Soul is a very personal aspect of the human being.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, it is the soul that goes on the gnostic journey of knowledge, towards its destiny in the spiritual sphere. The soul's ultimate goal is therefore liberation "with the aid of divine messengers and redeemers."<sup>17</sup> However, sometimes the gnostic soul is overwhelmed by the evil of the lower world and it loses track of its journey, as well as the spirit. During this state of suffering, described as 'drunkenness' or 'sleep,' the "dark evil powers wish to hold the soul fast in their realm and therefore infatuate it."<sup>18</sup> Only by achieving true gnosis can the soul be saved from this state and evil of the world.<sup>19</sup> It is for this reason that gnostic philosopher Hans Jonas (emphasis added) argues that Gnosticism is "an absolute rift between man and that in which he finds himself lodged: the world"—explaining that the gnostic soul "is thrown into an *antagonistic; anti-divine* and therefore *anti-human* nature" from which it has to escape.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, gnostic literature informs us that towards the end of the gnostic journey, the soul is reborn or resurrected after remorse is shown.<sup>21</sup> The soul is purified and exempted from the evils of the lower world, free to fully embrace the spiritual being. This process can often occur in the face of death or at the apocalypse or purely as a psychological reawakening. After the rebirth, the soul is "at one with the divine Self" as it "emerges at last from this darkness and is able to see with new eyes."<sup>22</sup>

Based on this brief description of Gnosticism, specific traits and characteristics that are essential to this worldview can be identified as:

- 1) the rebirth of the gnostic soul
- 2) the notion of the good versus evil
- 3) an awareness of being an outsider or a sense of alienation in the world
- 4) escapism

These main characteristics of Gnosticism are seen as the fundamental steps in the journey of the soul. Firstly, as the gnostic soul finds itself in a world separated by good and evil, it becomes increasingly aware of being an outsider, and the soul then develops a strong desire to escape (literally and figuratively) from the world to gain intimate spiritual knowledge. During this journey, specific signs of Gnosticism can also be identified that aid the gnostic soul. The signs include the presence of supernatural beings, an ethical like-mindedness as well as a collision and balance of polarities.<sup>23</sup>

### **Gnosticism and the Digital/Technological Age**

Considering Gnosticism in the current Digital Age, where technology has come to shape the notion of being, it has to be noted that in recent years both Cartesian dualism and Gnosticism have been challenged by several postmodern critics and theories.<sup>24</sup> More specifically it is often argued that Gnosticism is outdated, a perspective reserved only for scholars and historians.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Descartes' gnostic trails are present and significant in the 21st century, as they have adapted to the Digital Age. Literature concerning New Media and technology argue that the mythical framework and psychology of Gnosticism

show great relevance to the development of a digital society and contemporary technoculture.<sup>26</sup> Media theorist Erik Davis, for instance, argues that the Digital Age is loaded with gnostic motifs and themes, such as the pursuit of information.<sup>27</sup> Davis maintains that technology is employed in order to perfect the self and its surroundings, which is similar to the goal of Gnosticism. For this reason he identifies the term ‘techgnosis’ to refer to the correlation between Gnosticism and the Digital Age.<sup>28</sup> In addition, Douglas Rushkoff, in his enquiry into the cultural changes in the Digital Age, also maintains that an analysis of contemporary technological changes is similar to “studying the gnostic drive behind technology.”<sup>29</sup> Rushkoff argues that cyberspace is a place that reflects the teachings of any religion;<sup>30</sup> therefore it arguably also holds the teachings of Gnosticism. In many ways the pursuit of postmodern technology can be likened to the gnostic journey that strives towards overcoming evil.<sup>31</sup> It is no wonder then that MIT scientist David Seltzer proclaims virtual reality (a key element of the Digital Age) to be the “Holy Grail of computer sciences,” a metaphor which indicates the mystical and spiritual properties of technology.<sup>32</sup>

Gnosticism’s relevance within the Digital Age manifests in the conceptions of posthumanism and transhumanism. These two notions show a disregard for the human body and material worlds, in accordance with gnostic thought. Posthumanism refers to the notion of overcoming human nature through the means of technology – it is the final culmination of interceding and supplementing technology. According to Wolfe, posthumanism is what confronts the human race when we can no longer be classified as simple autonomous humans, but humans enhanced by technology. Thus for Wolfe posthumanism is what “comes after humanism.”<sup>33</sup> In turn, Wolfe refers to transhumanism as “a strand of posthumanism” that focuses on the perfecting and



enhancing of human capabilities through technology to overcome any form of distress.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of the gnostic perspective, as well as transcendence and the soul, posthumanism can be described as a venture aimed at achieving transcendence from the immanent biological body and evil world through technology. Hughes, Bostrom and Agar explain that posthumanism is the pursuit of transcendence through technology instead of through the means of spiritual practices.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Hook argues that “transhumanism is in some ways a new incarnation of Gnosticism. It sees the body as simply the first prosthesis we all learn to manipulate.”<sup>36</sup> To highlight the parallel between posthumanism and Gnosticism, Zimmerman identifies the following corresponding similarities:

1) [T]here is much to be dissatisfied with about the world (including being trapped in a pathetic, weak and mortal human body); 2) this world is replete of suffering, ignorance, and death that should be eliminated; 3) salvation from such evil is possible; 4) the order of being must be changed and perfected through developmental/evolutionary human processes; 5) humans are capable of effecting such change, first through transhumanism, but definitely through posthumanism; and 6) humans are now discovering the *gnosis* needed to bring about such change.<sup>37</sup>

### **Gnosticism, technology and film**

Art and other forms of visual culture have depicted Gnosticism, gnostic themes and the journey of the gnostic soul for several years. In particular the realm of film often portrays Gnosticism and the notion of transcendence. At the same time film, as a medium, sometimes evokes a transcending feeling in viewers. The world of cinema's visual language has a gnostic undertaking, as its devices (notably technological) have the ability to uncover knowledge about the self or the soul.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Paul Schrader suggests that there is a reoccurring film style (the everyday, disparity and stasis) that

several directors from various backgrounds employ to express the transcendent.<sup>39</sup> This film style perpetuates Gnosticism, since it is designed to allow the audience to gain insight, knowledge and self-awareness.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, several films explore gnostic characteristics, such as the good versus evil or appearance versus reality, in their narrative and themes. These films include *The Tree of Life* (2011), *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Vanilla Sky* (2001), to name just a few. More specifically, contemporary films with gnostic underpinnings, such as *Blade Runner* (1982) or *A.I.* (2001), frequently reflect the gnostic journey in the Digital Age, or Gnosticism in relation to technological advancements.<sup>41</sup> Of these films perhaps the most prominent is *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999-2003), which depicts a cyberpunk society where people awake from the evil material world, with the help of a guide, in order to find their true selves.<sup>42</sup> Therefore it can be argued that the film industry reflects an awareness of the gnostic journey of the soul in relation to modern technology.

### **Gnosticism, the Soul and Technology in Cuarón's *Gravity***

Perhaps the most recent film to depict Gnosticism in relation to technology is Cuarón's *Gravity*. The film illustrates a tale "haunted by an array of religiously evocative questions."<sup>43</sup> Cuarón constantly reminds the audience that they are not only following a space journey, but also a gnostic, spiritual journey, as *Gravity* questions what happens to the soul when it discovers that it is profoundly alone.<sup>44</sup> What follows is a discussion and analysis of *Gravity* in light of the above identified gnostic elements including the rebirth of the gnostic soul, the notion of the good versus the evil, a sense of alienation, and escapism.

### ***The Rebirth of the Gnostic Soul***

*Gravity's* account of Dr. Stone's excursion through outer space can be likened to the gnostic journey of the soul towards salvation. Ultimately the film portrays a tale of rebirth since it presents a being alienated and alone in a world from which she wishes to escape, making her way back to earth at the end of the film to arrive home safely. Her soul is then 'reborn' and finds peace as she develops a new lust for life. Renshaw confirms this gnostic journey:

If life is suffering and in the end we are all alone what is the point? For Mission Specialist Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) this is the question that drives her journey, a journey that takes her from the stultifying emotional death that has been the effect of having lost her child to the brink of her immanent physical death and ultimately to a renewed engagement with life.<sup>45</sup>

Considering this gnostic journey of the soul in space, it becomes clear that Cuarón's choice to have a woman in the driver's seat is no coincidence. As mentioned, the gnostic soul is usually portrayed as a woman and thus the female protagonist perfectly embodies the gnostic journey of rebirth. Similar to the female soul, the female astronaut symbolizes fertility, since the female body is the source of new life. Therefore the female astronaut's body holds the promise of giving birth to new life and represents a renewed sense of hope that accompanies the spiritual realm of the gnostic sphere. The juxtaposition of a so-called typically male engendered name given to a female protagonist shows the importance of the female role throughout the film. This fertility and theme of rebirth is then prominent in *Gravity*.

The spectacle of the astronautic body attached to a space suit is the junction between man and machine. It thus resembles the imagined rebirth of humanity as one with technology, a rebirth located in space. In this manner the space suit and ship can

be likened to ‘an external womb’ which houses the ‘fetus’ of the astronaut.<sup>46</sup> Furthering this metaphor, the image of the astronaut attached to the space ship by a braided steel tether can represent the umbilical cord that ties the astronaut to technology, acting as a reminder of gravity (a force that always pulls the astronaut back). Perhaps this image is best recognized in the opening scenes of the film, where Mission Specialist Shariff enjoys a spacewalk (below). The image of Shariff’s astronautic body floating in space clearly signifies the rebirthing possibilities between technology and the soul.



Several other images related to Ryan, stripped of her suit, reflect the notion of rebirth. For instance, once she reaches her first tentative point of safety she takes off her space suit and gently tumbles through the ISS (International Space Station), surrounded by cables (below). The image once again reminds of the fetus within the womb of the space station, attached to the umbilical cords, kindling the possibility that fertility, rebirth or then new life, can exist within a purely technological environment. Furthermore, when Stone accepts that she is going to die, the accidental radio signal she has tuned into resounds the cry of a baby and a man singing her to

sleep, reminding her – and the audience – of her daughter’s infancy and the “tropes of maternity, birth and rebirth.”<sup>47</sup>



These ideas of rebirth and the fertile female body are not new concepts in Cuarón’s work. His dystopian science fiction film, *Children of Men* (2006), portrays an infertile society that is falling to pieces. The only hope is a pregnant female refugee, who goes on a journey to safety with the main character Theo. Where *Gravity* symbolizes a journey with the potential of rebirth and hope, *Children of men* literally shows how (re)birth becomes a symbol of hope and faith to a world in total despair.

### ***The Notion of Good versus Evil***

*Gravity*’s gnostic journey takes place within a universe where the forces of good and evil, akin to the force of gravity, pull the characters in various directions. The astronaut’s main desire is to escape from the evil matter on planet earth. The journey into space is the literal act of fleeing from the evil of earth to “simply break the natal bond of gravity between body and earth.”<sup>48</sup> Although the film does not reveal why

Ryan chose to become an astronaut, it is evident that she wishes to break free from the sadness of the death of her daughter that she experienced on earth as she recounts: “I had a daughter. She was four. She was at school playing tag. Slipped, hit her head, and that was it. Stupidest thing. I was driving when I got the call, so... ever since then, that’s what I do. I wake up, I go to work, and I just drive.”

If earth is then seen to be evil and a bonding force, this should then automatically imply that outer space is a ‘good’ place, or the place of salvation, since this is where astronauts escape to. However, *Gravity* proves (in accordance with Gnosticism) that outer space too is considered evil. The evil and injustice of Earth cannot be avoided through a simple change of perspective. Once Ryan realizes that she needs to go back to Earth to survive, outer space becomes the ‘bad’ realm. This is highlighted by the uncontrollable space debris that destroys the space station and detaches the two characters from one another. Even in space there are dark uncontrollable forces that represent evil. As Ryan takes a last look at the destroyed station she proclaims, “I hate space,” affirming that the divine is not simply located in the literal realm above earth. This is in agreement with Romanyshyn who argues that not even the technologically formed astronautic body can quit Earth. Moreover, the voyage of the human body into outer space is only considered successful if it does return to Earth.<sup>49</sup>

As soon as Ryan confesses that she hates space, the audience realizes that there is no escape from evil: “for the human race there is *no space* anymore, at least no durable occupation of outer space. That is, there is no way to escape from Earth.”<sup>50</sup> The only good now exists in the transcendent journey of the soul back to its divine home as prescribed by Gnosticism. The notion of the spiritual home (and its

gravitational force) becomes the sole motivation of good that helps Ryan Stone survive and return to Earth.<sup>51</sup>

### *A Sense of Alienation*

Renshaw contends that *Gravity*'s central premise is that of radical so(u)litude which "orients one towards death not life."<sup>52</sup> After the space debris crashes into their space station, Kowalski and Stone find themselves alone in an unfathomably large void. They are left alienated from the world as they lose all contact with Houston. They are literally *alienated* owing to the fact that they become extraterrestrial beings trying to, as ET would say, 'phone home.' In a metaphorical sense Ryan is also alienated from her life after the death of her daughter. Even on earth she is alone, as there is nobody "down there, looking up thinking about her." Her solitude on earth resonates with the gnostic notion that human beings are aliens on earth.<sup>53</sup> The plot of *Gravity* becomes "the ultimate case of existential dread, and a harsh lesson in the economics of being alone in the universe,"<sup>54</sup> which is perhaps one of a human's largest fears. The gnostic notion of solitude is then further emphasized when Stone has to physically let go of Kowalski in order to save herself. He lets go of her and drifts from her like a balloon drifting into the unknown void. She is now entirely alone.

The visual and sound effects of the film emphasize this alienation. Stone's breathing is constantly audible as the audience is reminded of her vulnerable status, her loneliness and her (breathing) soul. In addition, several scenes place the astronaut's body in opposition to the infinite parameter of space (below), which reminds the audience of "how small each individual life is against the whole."<sup>55</sup> A particularly significant visual image in the film occurs when Ryan safely enters the

ISS and looks out of the window calling out to Houston, confirming that she is alone and the sole survivor of the mission. In this scene, Ryan's face reflects in the window over earth. The image shows the alienated astronaut looking at earth and back at herself, as the view from space becomes part of her mirror image. It reveals that there is nobody but herself left in that world. The audience (and Stone) is left wondering if she will remain drifting or find her way back to earth. In this sense she is actually looking through the window of the gnostic soul, questioning her role as a being. Mirzoeff mentions that looking at earth from this particular perspective is for some a source of great spiritual and environmental insight, because it seems as if they are "viewing the planet as if from the place of a god."<sup>56</sup> Similarly, from this alienated perspective where the earth is constantly on the horizon, Ryan gains spiritual insight (or gnostic knowledge). She learns to accept the death of her daughter and finds that there is still hope and sense to her life on earth.







### *Escapism*

As revealed in the above discussions, space travel implies the gnostic notion of escaping from earthly matter. The astronaut's journey from earth into space can represent the desire to physically flee from the material world (and gravitas).<sup>57</sup> Lieutenant Matt Kowalski's trip to space reflects this escape from earth. For him there is no better place to be than in space. He describes his job as "kind of like winning the lottery" with an unbeatable view. He also finds no difficulty in letting go in order to save Ryan. He is content to die in space and still makes jokes and admires the view while he drifts towards his death with the final words "Oh, my God ... Wow ... It's amazing." Kowalski's idea of home and the transcendent is not related to earth; instead his soul finds peace and is at home within. He has escaped from the material world.

### *Additional Motifs of Gnosticism*

It is worth noting that throughout the film several other signs also evoke the sense of Gnosticism. Firstly, various collisions of different matter symbolize the gnostic

collision of dualities and polarities. It is the clash of the space station with the space debris that acts as the inciting moment of *Gravity*, which sparks the events of the rest of the film. The astronauts also collide into one another and the respective space stations in their attempt to find safety. In addition, the impact of the escape pod into Earth brings forth the final steps of transcendence.

Secondly, *Gravity* also makes reference to supernatural beings, specifically angels. To a certain extent, Matt Kowalski becomes an angel that helps Ryan in her journey. In a particular scene, Ryan is about to give up on life, when an apparition of the assumedly dead Kowalski appears and motivates her to move on. He explains to her that life is not about what happens to a person, but how a person reacts to situations. He then proceeds to help her find a way to get home. Furthermore he brings a relief to her persistent loneliness. Renshaw describes the vision of Kowalski as a “God-like apparition,” placing him within the divine realm.<sup>58</sup> The country song *Angels are hard to find* by Hank Williams, Junior that he listens to during the mission accentuates Kowalski’s angelical status. Ultimately, during the final scene, Ryan drags herself onto land and she whispers “thank you” to a seemingly higher presence, expressing her gratitude to the divine beings.

Finally, evident signs of transcendence, spirituality and soulfulness are seen throughout the film. These include close-up images of mementos in the space station, such as a Buddha statue and Saint Christopher icon that relate to Buddhist and Catholic traditions, respectively. Reference is also often made to the afterlife, prayer and the soul highlighting the supernatural parameters of the gnostic realm.

## Conclusion

Given the gnostic traits present in *Gravity* and Stone's gnostic journey of the soul presented on screen, perhaps the most important point of discussion is the role of technology within this journey. Romanyshyn describes the entire concept of space flight as "the dream of technology."<sup>59</sup> Everything from the suits to the stations unites man and machine in space, evoking the gnostic ideal of the posthuman. In the film technology becomes an aid which makes escape (from earth and back to earth) possible. It provides the place and means for salvation and rebirth, thus it becomes the means for the soul's gnostic journey. Therefore, in gnostic terms, technology can be seen as the mediator, messenger and intercessor between the human soul, the evil earthly body and the divine. It is only when the soul has completed its journey and is ready to move forward that there is no further need for the technological intervention. This is illustrated in the final scene of the film where Ryan walks into nature, completely rid of technology.

From a critical point of view, this ending – where the posthuman astronaut purges itself of all technology in favor of nature - could be interpreted as a rejection of materiality and Gnosticism. In other words, perhaps Cuarón is arguing against a gnostic post/transhuman ideal to aid the soul in its journey. However, during the final scene, Ryan drags herself onto land and whispers "thank you" to a seemingly higher presence, expressing her gratitude to the divine. I contend that this indicates Ryan's understanding that her posthuman journey was necessary and inevitable, in order for her to achieve the true state of gnosis and decide to continue her life with a new sense of being. Thus the posthuman remains an imperative part of the gnostic journey in the Digital Age, but it can still be disposed of once the soul does not need it anymore.

Consequently, from a gnostic point of view, technology can be said to act as an aid to reach the divine. It becomes part of the so-called ‘master plan’ towards the journey of the transcendent soul. *Gravity* demonstrates that in the gnostic worldview, technology reveals the transcendent.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, the film leaves the audience with a sense of hope that a return to the good, or salvation, is possible. All that is needed is one small step for man and one giant leap of faith for mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Casey’s article “The return of the soul,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 102(2013): 31 and Robert Gall’s article “Fideism or faith in doubt? Meillassoux, Heidegger, and the end of metaphysics,” *Philosophy Today* (2013).

<sup>2</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E Haldane and GRT Ross (England: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Farley. *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Larry W Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005): 519.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. RM Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001): 265.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. J Bowden (London: T&T Clark, 2001), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Meera Lester, *The Everything Gnostic Gospels Book* (USA: Adams Media, 2007), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Strikingly, Gnostics often inscribe the lower world with feminine attributes such as sensuality, vulnerability, fertility, receptivity and empathy, while the upper world is characterized as being masculine. The soul is often gendered as female during its journey on earth while the spirit is gendered as male, encouraging a change from the flawed female body to the divine male spirit.

<sup>12</sup> Oliver Krueger, “Gnosis in cyberspace? Body, mind and progress in posthumanism,” *Journal of Evolution & Technology* 14 (2005): 82; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 65.

<sup>13</sup> Krueger, “Gnosis in cyberspace?,” 82.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> This approach to body, soul and spirit correlates with the psychological perspective of CG Jung. Jung has been an influential part of interpreting contemporary Gnosticism as he equates psychological states to the gnostic journey of the self.

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<sup>16</sup> June Singer, "The evolution of the soul," in *The Allure of Gnosticism*, ed. Robert A Segal et al. (Illinois: Open Court, 1995), 56.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolph, *Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>19</sup> These gnostic features of the soul are derived from the ancient gnostic text entitled *Exegesis on the Soul*, which describes the gnostic myth of the soul.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism and modern nihilism," *Social Research* 19 (1952): 435; 450.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolph, *Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Singer, "The evolution of the soul," 68.

<sup>23</sup> The presence of supernatural beings refers to the existence of beings that have non-human properties such as the ability to change circumstances. In Gnosticism, these beings are usually believed to obtain their non-human properties from the divine realm or God (who himself is considered to be a supernatural being). Accordingly, supernatural beings include angels, the devil, ghosts, goddesses and similar entities. Within the gnostic realm much emphasis is placed on the existence of angels as descending or fallen souls that return to earth to act as messengers and mediators between human beings and the divine. For further studies of angels, especially in a postmodern context, see Paul Lévy's *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (1999), Luce Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993) and Michel Serres's *Angels: A Modern Myth* (1993).

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949) and Paul Churchland's *Matter and Consciousness* (1984) against dualism, as well as Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1983) critiquing Gnosticism.

<sup>25</sup> Refer to Robert Segal, introduction to *The Allure of Gnosticism*, by Robert Segal et al. (Illinois: Open Court, 1995), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), 78.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, "The Future is now," accessed 21 February 2017.  
<http://www.rushkoff.com/the-future-is-now-interview-with-reality-sandwich/>

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> This is often echoed in the literature on technology of key theorists such as Davis, Žižek, Krueger, Boehme, List, Eerikäinern and Heim. Additionally, Neil Postman also argues in *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1993) that 'no culture can flourish without narratives of transcendent origin and power' establishing the relevance of transcendence in any culture – including the Digital Age.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Seltzer as cited in Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 123.

<sup>33</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, xiii.

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- <sup>35</sup> James Hughes, Nick Bostrom and Nicholas Agar, "Human vs posthuman," *The Hastings Center Report* 37 (2007): 4.
- <sup>36</sup> Christopher Hook, "The techno sapiens are coming," *Christianity Today* 48 (2004).
- <sup>37</sup> Michael E Zimmerman, "Religious motifs in technological posthumanism," *The Philosophical Review* 53(6) (2009): 557-574.
- <sup>38</sup> Tom Gunning, "In your face: physiognomy, photography, and the gnostic mission of early film," *Modernism/modernity* 4 (1997): 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (California: Da Capo Press, 1972).
- <sup>40</sup> Crystal Downing, *Salvation from Cinema: The Medium is the Message* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
- <sup>41</sup> Eric Wilson, *Secret Cinema: Gnostic Visions in Film* (New York: Continuum, 2006).
- <sup>42</sup> Frances Flannery-Dailey, and Rachel L. Wagener. "Wake up! Gnosticism and Buddhism in *The Matrix*," *Journal of Religion and Film* 5 (2001): 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Sal Renshaw, "Gravity," *Journal of Religion & Film* 18 (2014): 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Renshaw, "Gravity," 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Robert Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (London: Routledge, 1989), 18-19.
- <sup>47</sup> Renshaw, "Gravity," 5.
- <sup>48</sup> Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, 29.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 29; 205.
- <sup>50</sup> Bruno Latour, "Telling friends from foes at the time of the anthropocene" (paper presented at EHESS-Centre Koyré-Sciences Po symposium Thinking the Anthropocene, 14-15 November, Paris, 2013).
- <sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Ryan's surname, 'Stone', also alludes to the notion of gravity. A stone is closely related to the concept of nature and earth, while the throwing of a stone indicates the force of gravity. Therefore the force of gravity and the pull towards the transcending notion of home is even embedded in Ryan's most essential being.
- <sup>52</sup> Renshaw, "Gravity," 3.
- <sup>53</sup> Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, 19.
- <sup>54</sup> Stuart Klawans, "Weightless burdens," *The Nation* (2013), 33.
- <sup>55</sup> Renshaw, "Gravity," 3.
- <sup>56</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* (Pelican Books, 2015), Kindle edition.
- <sup>57</sup> Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, 29.
- <sup>58</sup> Renshaw, "Gravity," 4.

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<sup>59</sup> Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> This illustrates Martin Heidegger's argument in *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) that 'technology is way of revealing.'

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