

# Can Technology Save the World?

*"The high tide!" King Alfred cried.*

*"The high tide and the turn!"*

*G. K. Chesterton (The Ballad of the White Horse)*

Time and tide wait for no man. Only a fool believes that he can turn back time and only an idiot believes that he can command the tide. With respect to the latter, it is said that King Canute set his throne upon the beach and ordered the tide to stop before it reached him. He got his feet wet and was forced to beat a hasty retreat, throne and all, from the inexorable power of the sea.

It is ironic that King Canute should have a reputation for arrogance and ignorance when it is likely that he carried out the experiment (according to a twelfth century account of the legend) in order to expose the foolishness and flattery of fawning courtiers. When the tide lapped against his feet, in defiance of the royal command, he offered some priceless words of wisdom to those who put their faith in worldly rulers. "Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings," he declaimed, "for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws." He is then said to have hung his crown on a crucifix and never to have worn it again "to the honour of God the almighty King".

King Canute can be seen to be a kindred spirit to the chastened and converted King Lear, who refers to flattering courtiers as "gilded butterflies" and "poor rogues [who] talk of court news". Shakespeare shows how Lear does not gain the true wisdom which is inseparable from humility until he is forced, through suffering, to see the foolishness of worldly

“wisdom”. It is only when he is stripped of all worldly power that he achieves a liberating detachment from worldly cares.

In the eyes of the world, the Franciscan wisdom and unworldliness of Lear is but foolishness. True wisdom, for the worldly, is inseparable from pride and the quest for power and control. It's not about detachment from the things of the world but attachment to them. It's about self-empowerment and the ability to take control of one's destiny.

And this brings us to the question of technology. For the worldly, technology is the means by which empowerment and control are attained. Technology provides the tools with which we can take control of the future. The more we put our trust in technology, the more ability we will have to solve whatever problems the future might hold. Faith in God has been replaced by faith in scientific “science” and the technological power it can provide to control the future.

It is true that technology has power. There's no doubt about it. It even seems to have the power to make time wait for man, in defiance of the age-old idiom. It allows us to live longer, delaying time's ushering in of death. It will be conceded, for the time being, that death can only be delayed and not denied, and that time can be kept waiting for a short while but not for long. Yet it's only a matter of time before technology can overthrow the power of time itself. True believers in technomnipotence have faith that death itself will one day be defeated and that man will finally achieve immortality. Technology will usher in a time when time itself will be made to wait interminably for man.

None of this is new. The medieval alchemists, in their quest for the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, were obsessed with discovering ways of achieving self-empowerment through defeating the power of death and turning dross into gold. The modern technologically-driven pharmaceutical industry has turned base metal into mountains of gold in its

quest for the elixir of life. The more things change, the more they remain the same. And that's the point.

Some things never change because they transcend time itself. They are timeless. These timeless things are the truths which defeat time in another sense from that envisaged by the worshippers of technology. They defeat time by defeating the spirit of time, the time-spirit, the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age. Those who put their faith in timeless truth and not temporal technology are not subject to the intellectual fads and fashions of the age. They know that pride does not usher in self-empowerment but, on the contrary, it ushers in the self-deception which leads to self-destruction; or, to put the matter more idiomatically, pride precedes a fall.

When the power of technology is put at the service of the power of pride, there can only be one outcome. Indeed, for those with eyes to see, the writing is already on the wall. Technology has been put to great use in the development of weapons of mass destruction. Those seeking power over others through the use of technology have unleashed blitzkrieg on innocent civilians in the bombing of cities, dropping megatons of explosives from flying machines. From the dropping of bombs we have "progressed" to the dropping of The Bomb. We have put doomsday in our own hands. And then there has been the use of technology to develop poison gas. It was used against soldiers in World War One and then against civilians during World War Two, the gas masks of the first war making way for the gas chambers of the second. And then there are the biological weapons, invented in laboratories that are far more deadly than the recent covidious pestilence. We have the power to kill millions locked up in test tubes.

None of this will shake the blind faith of the technophile "progressives" because there are none so blind as those who will not see.

As for those with eyes, we will learn the lessons that time

teaches through history, tradition, legend and idiom. We will learn from King Canute that no worldly power can defeat the power of the cosmos nor the will of the One who rules the cosmos. We will learn from King Lear that we need to be detached from addiction to self-empowerment, knowing that our mortal lives and any mortal power we might have are lent to us. We do not *own* our lives. We *owe* them to the giver of life. They are not ours to keep and we will have to relinquish them when our leasehold on life is over. Death will not be cheated, nor will the Lord of Life who has power over death itself.

And we will also learn from King Midas that those who value self-empowerment over life and love are destined to turn living bread into lifeless gold, substituting the culture of life for the culture of death. We will also learn from King Midas that the culture of death is not only deadly but suicidal. It has no sustainable future.

And this brings us to King Alfred, a wise and noble king who defended and saved Christendom from pagan hordes who worshipped self-empowerment. Outnumbered and armed with little more than hope, King Alfred prevailed. He knew that time and tide wait for no man but he also knew that the tide must turn. "The high tide!" King Alfred cried. "The high tide and the turn!"

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