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Transhumanism, Religion, and Techno-Idolatry: A Derridean Response to Tirosh-Samuelson

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Abstract

This paper critiques Hava Tirosh-Samuelson's view of transhumanism as techno-idolatry by applying Derrida's notion of the unconditional "to-come" and the generalized fetish. While acknowledging Tirosh-Samuelson's stance that fetishes should not be reduced to idols, I argue that she fails to extend this understanding to transhumanism, instead depicting its fetishes as fixed idols. Drawing on Derrida's notion of the generalized fetish, I argue that religious objects in Judaism (like the *shofar* or *tefillin*) function not as objects of worship but as material mediators of divine relation—tangible signs that carry symbolic, spiritual, and covenantal meaning while gesturing toward the divine without claiming to contain or represent it. Similarly, in transhumanism, brain-computer interfaces and AI act as fetishes that extend human capability and potential while remaining open to future reinterpretation. These fetishes, reflecting Derrida's idea of the unconditional "to-come," resist closure and allow for ongoing change and reinterpretation. By reducing transhumanism to mere idolatry, Tirosh-Samuelson overlooks how technological fetishes function as dynamic supplements, open to future possibilities and ongoing reinterpretation, which can be both beneficial and harmful to humanity now and in the future.

Keywords: Derrida; fetish; idolatry; messianic; religion; salvation; supplement; technology; techno-idolatry; unconditional to-come (*à venir*); transhumanism



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1. Introduction

Transhumanism, the belief in the use of advanced technologies to radically enhance human capacities, has been sharply criticized by scholars concerned with its spiritual and ethical implications. Although the term encompasses a wide range of perspectives and goals, it is often treated as a unified movement in critiques that emphasize its most extreme or utopian strands. Among the most vocal is Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, who warns that transhumanism risks becoming a form of techno-idolatry. In her account, idolatry refers to the veneration of human-made objects in place of God. Transhumanism, by promising salvation through technological mastery, becomes, in her view, a secular religion wherein humanity worships its own creations. Her concern regarding transhumanism, salvation and techno-idolatry reflects a deeper tension between religious and secular visions of salvation: traditional religious eschatologies grounded in divine grace clash with techno-utopian aspirations for human self-redemption.

Yet such a religious-secular dichotomy may oversimplify the complex symbolic and affective relations transhumanists maintain with technology. To unpack the complexity of transhumanism, we turn to Jacques Derrida, whose philosophical interventions offer a more nuanced vocabulary. Central to Derrida's thinking is the figure of the *fetish*—an

undecidable object that simultaneously evokes attachment and detachment, dependence and disavowal. Etymologically linked to the act of making (*facio*), the fetish is something crafted, yet it exerts power over the maker, blurring the line between subject and object. In this sense, technology is not merely an idol to be condemned but a *supplement*: an addition that both completes and reveals the incompleteness of what came before. Through Derrida's notion of *messianicity without messiah*—the *à venir*, or that which is always still to come—we gain a framework for thinking beyond fixed idols and toward open-ended, indeterminate futures.

This paper argues that while Tirosh-Samuelson rightly cautions against the dangers of techno-idolatry, she reduces transhumanism to a closed and static form of worship. Drawing on Derrida, I contend instead that many transhumanist engagements with technology are better understood as fetishistic rather than idolatrous. While Tirosh-Samuelson draws on a clear theological tradition in her critique of idolatry, my aim is not to dispute the biblical grounding of that position, but to engage critically with her use of the term “fetish,” which, when left conceptually indistinct from “idol,” risks overlooking the theoretical and ethical complexity that a Derridean reading can illuminate. This distinction matters: fetishism, as Derrida shows, is not merely a pathology but a mode of relation that resists closure, sustains deferral, and opens up critical spaces for rethinking futurity, ethics, and faith.

2. Idolatry, Fetishism, and the Risk of Conflation

Before turning to my own analysis of the fetish and its theological implications, I engage directly with Tirosh-Samuelson's theological critique of transhumanism. In what follows, I summarize her argument that transhumanism constitutes a form of techno-idolatry that displaces the divine and deforms the human. Then, I challenge her framework by examining the conceptual slippage between fetish and idol in her critique. Drawing on Derrida, I argue that not all transhumanist attachments should be collapsed into idolatry; rather, they often reflect the more ambiguous structure of the fetish—as supplement, prosthesis, and the trace of an unconditional future still to-come.

2.1. Tirosh-Samuelson's Critique of Transhumanism: Techno-Idolatry and the Spiritual Crisis of the Digital Age

Tirosh-Samuelson offers a theologically grounded critique of transhumanism as a form of techno-idolatry, arguing it displaces the divine with human-made artifacts. She contends that in seeking to transcend human finitude through technology, transhumanism secularizes core religious concepts—salvation, immortality, transcendence—recasting them in anthropocentric terms (Tirosh-Samuelson 2012, pp. 710, 731). While she acknowledges that “transhumanism is so diverse and constantly evolving, it is hard to generalize about it or to debate with its advocates. . . so that transhumanism is indeed a ‘work in progress’” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2018, p. 202), she nonetheless treats its various strands as unified by a shared vision of transition from biological humanity to mechanical posthumanity. She admits this coherence may be imposed rather than inherent but insists it is necessary to grasp transhumanism's cultural significance—even if, in her view, it remains deeply misguided.

My critique engages this framing: although Tirosh-Samuelson acknowledges transhumanism's internal diversity, she constructs a coherent critical narrative from it, which then becomes open to critical response on its own terms. As she writes, “transhumanism has secularized traditional religious motifs at the same time as arguing that transcendence is technologically feasible” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2017, p. 279). She further insists that in “the transhumanist myth, death is the ultimate enemy, and it will be vanquished, not by supernatural divine intervention. . . but through engineering” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2017,

p. 270). This displacement, she claims, constitutes idolatry by substituting human works for God and collapsing the Creator/creature distinction central to monotheism. She writes, “I have been critical of transhumanism for investing human-made technology with salvific meaning because transhumanism worships and venerates the human agent as if the human is a god. Bluntly put, transhumanism is techno-idolatry in which humans not only claim to ‘play God,’ but claim to be god” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2021, “Section III: Transhumanism as Techno-Idolatry”).

At the center of her critique is the claim that transhumanist ideology amounts to a form of modern fetishism, wherein technology is not merely a tool but becomes idolized as an object of veneration, awe, and ultimate hope. She emphasizes that while Judaism has historically embraced healing technologies as compatible with the divine will, the metaphysical dualism and soteriological ambitions of transhumanism go far beyond medicine. They aim not just to heal the body but to re-engineer and ultimately replace it with machine-based posthuman forms. In doing so, transhumanism ascribes salvific meaning to human innovation, thereby turning technological artifacts—algorithms, intelligent machines, platforms—into idols.

Tirosh-Samuelson highlights the elevation of tech leaders like Jeff Bezos, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg to near-messianic status, with their products—smartphones, AI, data platforms—becoming objects of mass devotion. This messianic reverence of tech icons mirrors classical idolatry: creations are worshipped not for what they signify but in themselves. As she states, “idol worship is a form of fetishization in which the worshipper mistakenly substitutes some object for the god. This substitution is sinful because for the worshipper ‘the image is not a sign or symbol of god [...] it is god.’ In idolatry the worshipper commits the error of substitution because ‘the idol takes the place of the god in the eye of the worshipper’” (ibid.).

Tirosh-Samuelson’s theological critique is paired with a sociocultural analysis, arguing that transhumanist futurism is not merely speculative but an active narrative shaping current technological, political, and economic realities. Its value, she contends, must be judged not by its distant promises but by its troubling real-world effects today. As she explains, digital technologies have intensified social ills—addictiveness, loneliness, racism, misogyny, and economic disenfranchisement—not by causing them, but by reducing humans to quantifiable data and eroding empathy. She writes that digitization “has turned biological human beings into data that can be harvested to determine everything about us. The tech companies, our new technological idols, have taken our personal data (which people voluntarily share with them) and have monetized them for their own enrichment” (ibid.). The commodification of personal data deforms the *imago Dei*, turning humans into “raw material for tech corporations” (ibid.) and making us like the lifeless devices we create.

The reduction of the human to data is not merely a cultural or psychological shift—it reflects and reinforces deeper transformations in the economic and political order. Economic structures are transformed by AI and algorithmic capitalism. Calling algorithms the “new masters of the universe,” she critiques how automated systems displace human judgment and workers, advancing the transhumanist telos of replacing biological humanity with technological intelligence. Automated AI systems threaten labor, economy, and democracy. Drawing on Shoshana Zuboff’s concept of surveillance capitalism, she notes humans become raw material—information to be harvested and sold. Tech corporations, disguised as engines of progress, have become new idols, degrading human dignity and spiritual richness.

Politically, idolizing tech companies fosters disinformation, propaganda, and extremism, weakening democracy. For Tirosh-Samuelson, the resulting moral vacuum results from

technological deification. Techno-futurists like Mark Zuckerberg mask profit motives with utopian rhetoric, entrenching authoritarianism. She warns this convergence of algorithmic and autocratic tyranny creates a hybrid totalitarianism managed by data and machines. Even education is affected. The rise of digital humanities, with its focus on Big Data, reflects the transhumanist agenda. She critiques the reduction of humanistic inquiry to digital tools, which obscures education's deeper purpose: to cultivate virtues, empathy, and just action. She cautions that venerating Big Data as neutral is as idolatrous as worshipping money, power, or youth.

Tirosh-Samuelson's critique culminates in the claim that transhumanism is a spiritual crisis disguised as progress. It fetishizes technology by promising artificial salvation, turning humans into data and machines into gods. Its vision of "better" humans—faster, stronger, more efficient—comes at the cost of spiritual deadening. The obsession with enhancement, she argues, fosters indifference, emotional detachment, and moral compromise. By idolizing our creations, we devalue what we are: finite, embodied, interdependent beings made in the image of God (Tirosh-Samuelson 2021, "Conclusion").

For Tirosh-Samuelson, the ethical and theological stakes of transhumanism are urgent. Religious traditions—especially the Abrahamic faiths—must resist this idolatry of self-made salvation: "If we cannot reverse the process, at least we might try to slow down the technologization of life if world religions, especially the Abrahamic traditions, highlight the idolatrous nature of technology in which humans venerate themselves by worshipping their own products" (ibid.). The humanity transhumanism seeks to replace, she reminds us, is precisely the one that bears the divine image. Preserving that image means rejecting false transcendence and reclaiming humility, relationality, and compassion as the heart of a life worth living.

2.2. *From Fetish to Idol: The Conceptual Slippage in Tirosh-Samuelson's Critique of Transhumanism*

In "The Paradoxes of Transhumanism," (Tirosh-Samuelson 2021) Tirosh-Samuelson offers a trenchant theological critique of transhumanism, characterizing it as a form of "techno-idolatry." She contends that the veneration of technology, particularly within transhumanist discourse, amounts to a spiritual misdirection akin to biblical idolatry. While she seems aware of the conceptual difference between a fetish and an idol, her analysis fails to consistently honor this distinction. In fact, she regularly conflates the ambiguity of fetishism with the totalizing substitution characteristic of idolatry, thereby collapsing important theological and philosophical nuances.

Tirosh-Samuelson draws on Jewish tradition to define idolatry broadly as the misrepresentation or substitution of the true God with finite created things, violating divine singularity (Exodus 20:3–5; Isaiah 42:8). She highlights thinkers like Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit who stress that idolatry extends beyond false gods to forbid any representation claiming to capture God's essence. Even Maimonides warns that literal readings of anthropomorphic language risk idolatry by undermining divine transcendence. In contrast, Tirosh-Samuelson does not give sufficient space for explicating her understanding of the fetish—particularly in her recent works discussing transhumanism and idolatry (in particular, Tirosh-Samuelson 2021, 2022). The operational definition I will use here will be based on a brief explication of the etymology of the term, *fetish*. A fetish, according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Etymology Online 2025), is a material object believed to possess mysterious powers or to channel a divine or supernatural force, often inspiring awe or devotion. Originally used by Portuguese traders to describe African religious talismans, the term entered European discourse through anthropology and took on broader meanings, including irrational reverence or blind devotion. Unlike an idol, which replaces the divine, a fetish mediates an unseen force—marking a site of enchantment, artifice, and

ambiguous presence. The word derives from the Portuguese *feitiço*, meaning “charm” or “sorcery,” itself rooted in the Latin *facticius* (“artificial,” from *facere*, to make or do). This etymological root—to make, to fabricate—underscores how fetishism is fundamentally linked to artifice, production, and technology. As such, the fetish emerges not merely as a religious artifact but as a technological construct, resonating with the kinds of artificial extensions and synthetic objects celebrated in transhumanist imaginaries. Technologies, especially digital and speculative ones, embody this same logic of fabricated power and enchanted supplementarity, promising to mediate, enhance, or even transcend the human condition.

As it appears in Derrida’s work, the fetish is marked by ambiguity, undecidability, and supplementarity (Derrida 1987, 1990, 1994, 2002a, 2002b). As a provisional definition, the supplement is something that both adds to and replaces an original, revealing the original’s incompleteness by simultaneously filling a lack and complicating notions of presence and absence (Lucy 2004, pp. 135–40). Undecidability for Derrida refers to a state where a decision cannot be definitively fixed or resolved, but instead remains open to multiple, often conflicting interpretations, but we’ll come back to this (Lucy 2004, pp. 147–52). The undecidable is very much linked to the fetish. A fetish, much like the supplement in Derrida, is not a full substitution or replacement for the divine; it is a trace, a stand-in, a paradoxical object that both defers and displaces presence. In this sense, the fetish is not necessarily idolatrous; it does not claim to be the thing-in-itself but instead participates in a structure of difference and delay. It is a prosthesis, an attachment that simultaneously acknowledges absence and seeks to fill it. This prosthetic logic contrasts sharply with the closed metaphysics of idolatry, which treats a finite object as the ultimate object of devotion—no longer a sign or stand-in, but the end-point, the thing-in-itself.

Tirosh-Samuelson’s critique of transhumanism’s techno-idolatry often conflates the distinct logics of fetish and idol. While she rightly notes that figures like Giulio Prisco employ religious language—speaking of uploading minds or becoming gods—her claim that this use of language proves literal idolatry assumes transhumanists take these tropes as theological substitution of God. Yet many operate within secular or non-theistic frameworks where “God” serves as metaphor, telos, or techno-utopian ideals. In this context, the use of religious language suggests fetishism: an aspirational attachment that acknowledges incompleteness while overinvesting in a substitute.

Tirosh-Samuelson’s argument falters by invoking the idol to highlight divine singularity’s betrayal but then retreating from the ambiguity of the fetish. Instead of exploring fetishism’s complexity, she uses it instrumentally to reinforce idolatry accusations, thus foreclosing a deeper interrogation of technological desire. Derrida’s work clarifies the distinction between fetish and idol: the idol totalizes and replaces; the fetish displaces and supplements. Moreover, her readings of transhumanist thinkers often carry moral judgment rather than analytical nuance, overlooking how secular imaginaries often appropriate religious language symbolically rather than literally. As Richard Lints notes, the *imago Dei* reminds us that human value reflects God, rather than replaces God (Lintz 2015). By seemingly lumping all technological imagination together, Tirosh-Samuelson risks promoting a rigid theology that cannot distinguish symbolic aspiration from metaphysical substitution. Her caution against transhumanism’s techno-idolatry as a “false messianism” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2022, p. 183) thus reads less as a nuanced critique than as a form of theological gatekeeping. Conflating the fetish and the idol obscures transhumanism’s complex dynamics. Rather than dismiss technological aspirations as false gods, we should attend to their operation within structures of deferral, absence, and longing. Derrida’s reflections on fetish, supplement, and the messianic to-come provide a more nuanced, open-ended framework that refuses to foreclose the future.

Although this paper focuses on a Derridean critique of Tirosh-Samuelson's conflation of fetishism and idolatry, it is helpful to note that other scholars have examined transhumanism as a secular or techno-religious phenomenon from different angles. For example, [Antosca \(2019\)](#) draws on Charles Taylor's concept of the "buffered-self" and Harari's "dataism" to frame transhumanism as a form of technological re-enchantment in a post-secular context. Likewise, [Kowalska \(2024\)](#) explores human uniqueness and techno-religious themes in science fiction, especially around AI and robotics. These accounts reinforce the view of transhumanism as not only technological but also culturally and symbolically charged. While my argument follows a different path, these contributions help clarify the broader resonance of transhumanist discourse.

3. Derrida's Generalized Fetish, the Supplement and the Messianic To-Come

The following section explores how Derrida's ideas help us understand belief, value, and the future: first, by showing how fetishism works through contradiction and excess (Section 3.1); second, by examining how the supplement both fills a lack and affirms it (Section 3.2); and third, by connecting these ideas to the messianic *to-come*, where the future remains open, uncertain, and always deferred (Section 3.3).

3.1. Derrida and the Fetish: Meaning, Excess, and Undecidability

Derrida's "Restitutions," in *The Truth in Painting*, is a densely layered reflection on value, fetishism, and interpretation—framed through Heidegger's famous reading of Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes. In order to understand how Derrida rethinks fetishism here, we must consider his references to Marx and Freud, as well as his own deconstructive practice. He is particularly concerned with the moment when an object loses its functional utility and is reabsorbed into symbolic or philosophical meaning. The shoes depicted in the painting, no longer worn or usable, become instead objects of aesthetic contemplation. But it is this very *uselessness*, Derrida argues, that opens up the potential for fetishization. He writes:

If one could speak here, if not of fetishization, at least of the conditions of a fetishization, both of the product and of the work, both of the shoes and of the painting, one would have to take hold of them again at the moment when the detached (relatively unstructured) out-of-service gives rise, in its very detachment, in its dereliction or its separation, to a sort of abyssal surplus value. To a bottomless outbidding. In the form of what one might call a truth-effect. The useless gives way to a speculative exploitation. It escapes from the space of production and tends toward absolute rarity, irreplaceable uniqueness. ([Derrida 1987](#), p. 345)

The moment of detachment—the object no longer in use—becomes the condition for its reattachment into a symbolic, even metaphysical economy of meaning. The shoes, displaced from their original function, are now re-inscribed as bearers of truth, as emblems of Being in Heidegger's interpretation. Such a transformation mirrors the Freudian fetish, in which a substitute object simultaneously veils and compensates for a traumatic loss. The fetish emerges not simply to deceive, but to stabilize meaning where something has been withdrawn or is lacking.

Derrida's reading also recalls Marx's critique of commodity fetishism ([Derrida 1994](#)). In capitalism, products become alienated from the labor that produced them; they appear autonomous and gain surplus value that masks their social origins. Similarly, Heidegger's philosophical interpretation of Van Gogh's shoes as revealing the essence of the peasant's life is, in Derrida's eyes, a speculative projection—an idealization that attributes metaphysical depth, meaning a supposed access to fundamental or ultimate truth, to an

aesthetic artifact. In this move, Derrida sees a kind of philosophical fetishism: the shoes, stripped of function, are made to stand in for something deeper, more “authentic,” more ontologically significant.

The act of interpretation thus becomes complicit in fetishization. Heidegger’s claim that the shoes disclose Being is not a neutral observation but a reinvestment of value into detachment itself. For Derrida, fetishism is not an error to be corrected, but a structural feature of how meaning, value, and presence emerge. What appears as a “truth-effect” is precisely the speculative overinvestment in what has been rendered useless—what he calls a “bottomless outbidding” (Derrida 1987, p. 345). The object is no longer just an object; it becomes singular, irreplaceable, elevated beyond its material existence.

For Derrida, fetishism is not just psychological (as in Freud) or economic (as in Marx), but ontological and aesthetic. It shows how our systems of value—be they interpretive, artistic, or philosophical—depend on reattaching significance to absence, disuse, or loss. For Derrida, to call this “truth” is already to have performed the fetishistic gesture. What is revealed is not Being, but the mechanism of idealization itself.

Grasping Derrida’s notion of fetishism in *Glas* requires moving beyond conventional views that dismiss fetishism as merely a psychological distortion or a relic of so-called primitive religion. Derrida does not treat the fetish as a simple *Ersatz* (artificial substitute) for a lost object, nor as a false object of devotion. Instead, he presents the fetish as a structural figure of undecidability—a condition in which a decision must be made, but no definitive criteria exist to ground it. Fetishism, for Derrida, does not merely mark a deviation from some prior truth; it discloses the *structural impossibility* of such truth ever being fully present or recoverable.

Derrida states that all efforts to found or to destroy religion converge on a desire to reduce fetishism: “To found or to destroy religion (the family production) always comes down to wanting to reduce fetishism” (Derrida 1990, p. 206). But the fetish resists such reduction. It cannot simply be discarded as a false object or impure belief. The drive to unveil the “thing itself”—to expose pure presence—always fails, precisely because the fetish *interrupts* that unveiling. It dramatizes the impossibility of returning to any stable, originary ground.

Central to Derrida’s formulation is the idea that the fetish is split by contraries. As he writes, “the fetish is split [*clivé*] by two contrary positions” (Derrida 1990, p. 226). This splitting is not a flaw or contradiction to be resolved; it is what gives the fetish its power. Drawing on Freud’s concept of disavowal (*Verleugnung*), Derrida explains that the fetish simultaneously affirms and denies castration, presence, or loss. It is constructed “at once on the denial and on the affirmation (*Behauptung*), the assertion or the assumption of castration” (Derrida 1990, p. 210). This simultaneous contradiction forms what Derrida calls *an economy of the undecidable*. That is, the fetish functions precisely because it cannot be decisively categorized or resolved. Such undecidability of the fetish is not a breakdown of meaning, but a productive structure. It fuels what Derrida describes as a “speculation on the undecidable”—a logic of play, of feints, that mimics the dialectic without resolving into synthesis. As he writes, “This speculation is not dialectical, but plays with the dialectical. The feint consists in pretending to lose, to castrate oneself, to kill oneself in order to cut [*couper*] death off. But the feint does not cut it off. . . On this condition does the economy become general” (ibid.). Here, Derrida proposes that the fetish does not seek truth in the traditional metaphysical sense. Instead, it circulates in a *general economy*, in which meaning is always deferred, bound by contradiction, and resistant to final grounding.

The distinction between *restricted economy* and *general economy* comes from Georges Bataille (Bataille 1997) and helps illuminate Derrida’s understanding of the fetish. A restricted economy operates within limits: it is goal-oriented, focused on utility, efficiency,

and measurable exchanges—like a business that produces and sells goods for profit. In contrast, a general economy considers the broader, excessive circulation of energy, meaning, or value that exceeds usefulness. It includes waste, sacrifice, luxury, and symbolic acts that do not serve practical ends. For example, in a potlatch ceremony, value is expressed not by saving wealth, but by giving it away or even destroying it—an act that creates social meaning through excess. The fetish does not belong to a system of use or truth; instead, it operates within a general economy where meaning arises through contradiction, excess, and undecidability. Like energy that cannot be contained, the fetish resists being reduced to a fixed symbol or simple substitute. It gains force not through clarity or stability, but through its oscillation between opposites—presence and absence, truth and illusion, loss and compensation.

The entanglement of the fetish in excess, contradiction, and undecidability is precisely why Derrida insists: “As soon as the thing itself, in its unveiled truth, is already found engaged, by the very unveiling, in the play of supplementary difference, the fetish no longer has any rigorously decidable status” (Derrida 1990, p. 226). The unveiling of truth always already brings with it supplementarity, mediation, and spacing. There is no untouched presence; thus, the fetish cannot be reduced to a simple substitute or error. Instead, it shows that what we call the “thing itself” is never simply there—it is always produced within a differential structure of signs.

Building on the logic of undecidability and structural excess, Derrida draws a further, crucial conclusion: “If the fetish is all the more solid, has all the more consistency and economic resistance and it is doubly bound to contraries, the law is indicated in the very subtle case and in the appendix” (ibid.). In other words, the power of the fetish—its persistence and resistance to critique—comes precisely from its undecidable bond to opposing poles. The more deeply it is entangled in contradiction, the more indestructible it becomes. He continues:

The fetish’s consistency, resistance, remanence [*restance*], is in proportion to its undecidable bond to contraries. Thus, the fetish—in general—begins to exist only insofar as it begins to bind itself to contraries. So this double bond, this double ligament, defines its subtlest structure. All the consequences of this must be drawn. The economy of the fetish is more powerful than that of the truth—decidable—of the thing itself or than a deciding discourse of castration (*pro aut contra*). The fetish is not opposable. It oscillates like the clapper of a truth that rings awry [*cloche*]. (Derrida 1990, p. 227)

In other words, fetishism is not something we outgrow, eliminate, or surpass; it is a structural condition for how we relate to meaning, presence, and value. This metaphor of the clapper or bell-pendulum is key: the fetish does not rest at either pole of presence or absence, but continually swings between them, never allowing closure. That is why “the fetish is not opposable.” It cannot be clearly set against the “truth” or “the real thing,” because it contaminates those very notions with supplementarity and substitution. Rather than being a mistake or corruption, the fetish marks the place where all meaning is negotiated—precariously, repeatedly, and without guarantee.

By utilizing Derrida’s understanding of the fetish, one comes to recognize that it is not merely a substitute for a lost origin or a token of false belief. The fetish is a signifier that occupies the place of a loss—without ever revealing or replacing what is missing. It exists in the *space of the undecidable*; it is neither presence nor absence, neither truth nor illusion, neither origin nor supplement, but something more fundamental: a structure that makes meaning possible through displacement, contradiction, and repetition. In this sense, Derrida does not simply generalize fetishism—he reveals that all meaning is structured like a fetish.

3.2. The Derridean Supplement

In Derrida's thought, the fetish and the supplement are twin figures of substitution—each revealing absence even as they conceal it, displacing origins, and unsettling any stable sense of presence. Just as the fetish replaces the “real thing” while disavowing its loss, the supplement fills a perceived lack in the self or a system—but in doing so, it also affirms that lack. Religion and transhumanism both depend on this structure of supplementarity: they engage in a recursive process of self-corruption, becoming-other, and technical self-replacement as the very means of their survival. This self-alteration—a constitutive act of *différance*—marks the unfolding of being not as identity, but as continual deferral and displacement of presence (Derrida 1982). The supplement, in Derrida's usage, is not merely an addition to something whole, but a necessary support that paradoxically reveals the incompleteness of what it supplements.

For Derrida, no concept, being, or institution can survive without engaging in a structure of auto-affection, which never yields a pure presence but only the trace of presence through substitution. As he writes: “the presence that it then gives itself is the substitutive symbol of another presence. . . this play of substitution and this symbolic experience of auto-affection. . . Such is the constraint of the supplement” (Derrida 1976, p. 154). The supplement is thus not merely an additive gesture but a structural necessity: it allows something like religion, the human, or transhumanism to persist by means of what it is not—by becoming other than itself. There is no essence, no pure self, but only the survival of the name through supplementation.

According to Derrida, the supplement is dangerous. It names both lack and support, presence and deferral. It fills a void only by acknowledging the void it fills, and so, as Derrida warns, it threatens us with death even as it enables the process of life: “this presence is at the same time desired and feared. . . the supplement is dangerous in that it threatens us with death” (Derrida 1976, p. 155). To supplement is to survive through a kind of loss—a becoming-technological, or becoming-prosthetic, in which one replaces part of oneself with an other, a proxy, or sign. Such an iterative process constitutes the structure of technics according to Derrida: “There is no future without everything technical, automatic, machine-like supposed by iterability” (Derrida 2002b, p. 83). Here, Derrida introduces a spectral machine of life and death: a structure where life persists only through repetition, displacement, and sacrifice. Survival demands technical mediation. Salvation, particularly in the transhumanist context, becomes entangled with a logic of sacrificial replacement—what Derrida names autoimmunity. The future is promised not through preservation, but through prosthetic substitution: through the death of what was, to make possible what is the unconditional to-come.

The structural paradox of the supplement deepens when Derrida turns to “mechanical reproduction”: far from reducing life to literal machines, he shows how iteration introduces novelty, rupture, and unpredictability into systems of survival. Rather, he describes a structure of iteration that introduces difference, unpredictability, and novelty. In this sense, the “machine” is a figure for technics as a condition of future survival. Transhumanist discourses, with their emphasis on bodily and cognitive enhancement, prosthetic extension, and technological salvation, that Tirosh-Samuelson clearly acknowledges and is concerned about, depend on this logic. But transhumanists and Tirosh-Samuelson alike misunderstand it: they treat the supplement as mastery, ultimate truth or reality, something God-like, rather than as the opening to alterity and death.

Religion, transhumanism, and the human itself survive by way of this prosthetic machinery of supplementation. Each is “bound up with complex, quasi-mechanical and technically replicable processes” (Armand and Bradley 2006, p. 3). Existence is prosthetic. To persist, an entity must put itself outside itself, exposing itself to the supplement, to

technics, to a necessary contamination. As Derrida famously puts it, “technology has not simply added itself, from the outside or after the fact, as a foreign body. . . this foreign or dangerous supplement is ‘originarily’ at work and in place in the supposedly ideal interiority of the ‘body and soul’” (Derrida 1995, pp. 244–45). Thus, life and technics are not opposed. Rather, technics haunts life from the beginning. Life is already technical: a process of self-replacement, an economy of death and repetition. As Derrida notes, “life is always already inhabited by technicisation” (Derrida and Beardsworth 1994, p. 52). The human is not a natural whole later disrupted by machines; the human is always already prosthetic, always already distributed across biological and non-biological supports.

Religions, likewise, survive through the same structure. As Derrida states, without contemporary technologies “there could be no religious manifestation today” (Derrida 2002b, p. 62). From sacred texts to live-streamed sermons, the religious is sustained through ever-evolving supplements. Even the Abrahamic traditions, as “religions of the book,” are inseparable from the technology of writing, inscription, and dissemination. In turn, these supplements are not neutral—they transform what they carry forward.

The operation of X without X—as in a religion without religion, or a human without humanism—clarifies this point. These are not contradictions, but ways of naming entities that persist through transformation, through the dislocation of their supposed essence. The X survives not in its original form, but through *différance*—by being emptied, re-inscribed, substituted, yet still recognizable in spectral form. What ensures this spectral continuity is the name: a trace that both refers and defers, that maintains identity through displacement. As Caputo puts it, “the thing itself slips away leaving nothing behind, save the name” (Caputo 1997, p. 43). The name becomes the placeholder for what was, enabling the survival of what no longer is. Through it, we trace the transformation of religion or the human, marking their deaths and survivals through prosthetic supplements.

The supplement—like the fetish—is both prosthesis and threat, promise and loss. It opens religion, transhumanism, and the human to the future, but only through sacrifice, repetition, and the incalculable. This is the structure of what Derrida calls autoimmunity: to survive, the self must continually supplement itself—opening to the other, becoming other, and risking itself in the very process of preserving itself. For religion, or for techno-ideological worldviews like transhumanism, survival depends on the constant use of the supplement—what may also be regarded as a kind of fetish. In this way, the logic of the supplement links directly to Derrida’s messianic structure of the unconditional to-come (*à venir*), which names not a specific future event, but an openness to radical alterity, to what cannot be foreseen or programmed. The fetishistic supplement is what sustains this openness, keeping the future radically unpredictable by ensuring that no presence is ever complete or immune to change. In both religion and transhumanism, this structure disrupts dreams of mastery and totality, revealing survival itself as a prosthetic gesture toward the unknowable and unconditional to-come.

3.3. The Fetish and the Messianic To-Come

The logic of the fetish and the supplement, as developed by Derrida, is intimately bound to the structure of the messianic and the *à venir*—the unconditional to-come. The fetish, like the supplement, emerges from a perceived lack or loss; it is both a prosthesis and a substitution, a stand-in that acknowledges absence while simultaneously disavowing it. In this sense, the fetish and the supplement never simply restore what is missing—they delay, defer, and displace it. They signal that what is desired can never be fully present, never entirely fulfilled. This deferral is precisely the movement of *différance*, through which meaning and identity are never complete but are instead always becoming, always arriving, *à venir* (to-come) (Derrida 1982).

The structure of delay and non-arrival is what underpins Derrida's notion of the *messianic without messianism*—a messianicity emptied of determinate content. Just as the supplement adds only by replacing, and just as the fetish substitutes in the absence of the “real thing,” the messianic holds open the promise of a future that is unforeseeable, incalculable, and not guaranteed. It is not the coming of a particular messiah—religious, political, or technological—but the expectation of something *other*, of the event, of the *arrivant* whose identity is never fixed in advance. “The messianic belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge” (Derrida 2002b, p. 56). It is not governed by any teleological program, nor does it conform to any specific messianism—even if, as Derrida stresses, it “remains marked by the Abrahamic traditions” (ibid.).

The fetish and the supplement sustain this structure of anticipation and deferral. As Derrida writes, the supplement “adds only to replace. . . if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. . . it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief” (Derrida 1976, p. 145). The fetish, too, works by standing in for what is absent, allowing desire and belief to persist in the face of indeterminacy. Both figures refuse the closure of certainty, thereby enabling a relation to the future not grounded in foreknowledge but in an openness to the unknown, the incalculable, and the impossible. The event of the messiah, if it is to remain an event in the eyes of Derrida, must “puncture every horizon of expectation. . . there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could—perhaps—be yet to come” (Derrida 1994, p. 213).

The supplement and the fetish thus serve as mechanisms by which the self, religion, or transhumanism maintain themselves across time—not by staying the same, but by becoming other. Their survival requires continual replacement, which is a form of death—a structural autoimmunity in which one must risk the self to preserve the self (Derrida 2002b, pp. 82–83). In this way, the supplement is a vehicle of both preservation and transformation. It keeps open the future not by securing it in advance, as transhumanist Singularitarians attempt to do with predictive models of what could be understood as an “AI messiah,” but by resisting any final closure, any determinable arrival.

For Derrida, the future—if it is to remain truly open—must remain undecidable. As John Caputo explains, the *viens* of the messiah “is not the call for a fixed and identifiable other, foreseeable and foregraspable. . . it does not give voice to a determinate vocation, an identifiable destined *telos*” (Caputo 1997, p. 99). The messianic promise is not fulfilled in a predetermined, and teleologically programmatic Singularity or a techno-utopia; rather, it is sustained in the same way a fetish sustains longing and desire: by standing in for what cannot yet come, or may never come, but which nonetheless animates and haunts the present. The fetish and the supplement are not errors or deviations—they are the very condition for waiting, for faith, for a future that remains unconditionally *to-come*.

The logic of the fetish and the supplement, when situated within Derrida's notion of the unconditional *to-come*, underscores the structure of endless deferral at the heart of the messianic. What is *to come* (*à venir*) must always remain *to-come*—that is, not something that can be grasped, known, or secured in advance. The danger arises when this openness is foreclosed by substituting a present object for what should remain indeterminate. To transform the promise into presence, to replace the messianic event with a determinate figure or object—be it a prophet, a machine, or a transhumanist utopian future—is to transform *messianicity* into *idolatry*. This act of transformation mirrors the very logic of idolatry Derrida warns against: freezing the flow of openness and deferral by elevating a particular presence to the status of finality. The supplement, though it stands in for what is absent, never completes the circuit—it functions only by deferring and displacing; it names a structure in which no final presence can be secured, only promised and postponed.

Even for the messiah to remain faithful to the structure of the messianic, must never fully arrive—at least not in a way that exhausts the promise of the *to-come*. As soon as the messiah appears as a concrete, identifiable figure, he risks becoming an idol: an object that attempts to arrest time, to close the openness of futurity, and to install a presence where there should remain an absence. For Derrida, the messiah is the figure of the *perhaps*, a future that should not be planned or programmed. This is why any attempt—religious or technological—to name or secure the future is not only an epistemological closure but an ethical failure. The figure of the “AI messiah” found in transhumanist projections often associated with the Singularity (Kurzweil 2005, 2024), for example, becomes an idol precisely because it claims to realize the promise—to bring the future into the present and to abolish uncertainty. Such fulfillment is not salvation but foreclosure: it kills the messianic by making it visible, graspable, decidable. It closes interpretation and closes off the new and the unexpected. Against this, Derrida insists on a fidelity to the promise as promise—a promise whose truth is in its postponement, whose force lies in its inability to be fulfilled without ceasing to be itself.

Having explored the intertwined structures of the fetish, the supplement, and the messianic *to-come*, I move to examine how these logics manifest within contemporary transhumanist discourse. The technological promises of figures like Kurzweil, Prisco, and others can be read as fetish-objects—supplements that simultaneously expose lack and defer fulfillment. Yet, when their ambiguity is suppressed and the future is rendered certain, these fetishes risk hardening into idols. In what follows, I argue—contra Tirosh-Samuelson—that while transhumanism harbors fetishes that may become idols, so too does Judaism. Therefore, we should not assume that a technological fetish is automatically an idol, but instead examine the conditions under which ambiguity, absence, and deferral are either preserved or foreclosed.

4. Transhuman and Judaic Fetishes: Between Fetish and Idolatry

These sections examine transhumanism’s use of technology through fetishism and idolatry, challenging common critiques with Derrida’s insights. First, I address Tirosh-Samuelson’s view of transhumanism as technological idolatry, showing its limits. Then, I explore how transhumanist technologies act as fetish-objects, comparing them to Jewish ritual items that mediate the sacred without becoming idols. Together, these sections highlight the delicate balance between our evolving technological and religious imaginaries.

4.1. Misreading Transhuman Fetishes

Tirosh-Samuelson’s critique of transhumanism is compelling in its moral urgency but is ultimately reductive in both its understanding of transhumanist discourse and its conceptual framing. She most clearly articulates her position through the following:

[T]ranshumanism is a new idolatry because it glorifies, idolizes, and fetishizes human-made technology, investing human products and human activities with salvific powers. Transhumanism rejects the existence of a transcendent God or the human worship of God and instead posits the worship of human-made ‘gods,’ the superintelligent machines that will eventually make biological humans obsolete. The worship of technology is idolatrous because it expresses the human infatuation with its own creative powers. (Tirosh-Samuelson 2022, p. 208)

Such a reading by Tirosh-Samuelson treats transhumanism as a unified theological error rooted in anthropocentric hubris, but it overlooks the movement’s diversity and complexity. Transhumanism lacks definitive doctrines and includes a range of ideological, religious, and philosophical views—as noted by Nick Bostrom, who acknowledges internal disagreements (Jordan 2006, p. 58). Contrary to claims that transhumanism opposes

theism, many religious groups integrate its aspirations with belief in a transcendent God. For example, the Mormon Transhumanist Association aligns radical transformation with Latter-day Saint doctrines (Cannon 2022), while Christian transhumanists see technological enhancement as an extension of God's creative work, seeking to renew rather than break with tradition (Redding 2019). Scholars like James Hughes even foresee new religious rituals and trans-spiritualities emerging from this overlap (Hughes 2007). These examples reveal a broad theological spectrum, challenging any simplistic view of transhumanism as inherently anti-divine.

Tirosh-Samuelson overstates the coherence and influence of transhumanism by declaring that "transhumanism is the ideology that gives coherence to our technological age... transhumanism has made us all obsessed with and addicted to technology. By fetishizing technology transhumanism makes humans like the digital technology it has created: indifferent, uncaring, and emotionally detached" (Tirosh-Samuelson 2021, "Conclusion"). In doing so, she conflates a subset of speculative futurism with the broader socio-technical realities of contemporary capitalism, scientific research, and digital culture. While it is true that transhumanist rhetoric often borrows from religious-inspired salvationist language, the movement itself is not monolithic; it encompasses libertarians, democratic techno-optimists, secular humanists, and even religious transhumanists. Her sweeping characterization elides these differences and treats cherry-picked proclamations as central dogma to the entire transhumanist movement.

Moreover, her critique rests on a sharp binary between divine transcendence and technological immanence, but it remains unclear whether she is distinguishing between the concepts of the fetish and the idol. She writes, "If idolatry is the veneration of that which is not God as if it is God, then the veneration and reverence of technology is idolatrous. The fetish becomes a substitute for God" (Tirosh-Samuelson 2021, "Section III: Transhumanism as Techno-Idolatry"). In her formulation, the terms "fetish" and "idol" appear conflated, treating the fetish as merely a false object of devotion—a degraded replacement for the divine. Yet this is precisely where a Derridean intervention becomes necessary so as to add clarity to the distinction between the fetish and the idol.

For Derrida, the fetish cannot be so easily condemned. In *Specters of Marx, Glas*, and "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida refuses to treat the fetish as merely a mistaken substitution. Rather, the fetish signals an *undecidability*—a site where meaning, presence, and absence are entangled. The fetish is not simply a false god; it is a *supplement* that both adds to and displaces the "original," revealing that the original was never pure or self-sufficient to begin with. To call the fetish a replacement for God is to presuppose the very stability and self-identity of the divine that Derrida's thought consistently troubles. As he writes in *Glas*, "The fetish's consistency, resistance, [restance], is in proportion to its undecidable bond to contraries. Thus, the fetish—in general—begins to exist only insofar as it begins to bind itself to contraries. So, this double bond, this double ligament, defines its subtlest structure. All the consequences of this must be drawn" (Derrida 1990). This structural binding to opposites—presence and absence, affirmation and negation, castration and its denial—prohibits the clarity of judgment that idolatry discourse seeks. The fetish's economy is not one of simple replacement or error, but of play, deferral, and the irreducible excess that resists theological closure.

Tirosh-Samuelson's framing of transhumanism as fetishistic idolatry overlooks the way Derrida radically rethinks both concepts. Transhumanist promises of transformation and enhancement, far from being naïve idolatries, may be symptomatic of a deeper *messianicity*—an openness to the *à-venir*, the unconditional to-come, that is never fully under human mastery. This does not absolve transhumanism of critique; rather, it shifts the terrain. Instead of condemning transhumanism as a false religion or as the antithesis of

the sacred, Derrida would prompt us to ask: what kind of hope is operative here? What kind of supplement, and what kind of ethical relation to alterity, finitude, and the spectral is at stake in these techno-optimist aspirations?

Derrida's rethinking of the fetish also challenges how we locate idolatry. In *Specters of Marx*, he draws on Marx's account of commodity fetishism to make a broader claim: "As soon as there is production, there is fetishism" (Derrida 1994). In other words, the moment something is made—crafted, shaped, or brought into being by human labour—it becomes capable of being invested with value or religious significance. This aligns with the etymology of "fetish," to which made or manufactured objects are treated as powerful or sacred. Derrida emphasizes that this logic of fetishism is not confined to techno-capitalist economies or technological ideologies like transhumanism. Rather, it appears in all systems of meaning-making, including religious traditions such as Judaism. Through this Derridean lens, fetishism is a structure that shapes how humans relate to the things they create and value. Even in religious practices, where objects like Torah scrolls, relics, or ritual artifacts are revered, we can find forms of attachment and projection that fit within this broader understanding of the fetish. What Derrida reveals is that fetishism is not the enemy of religion; it is one of the ways religion—and culture more broadly—takes form. When Tirosch-Samuels on singles out transhumanism as especially guilty of fetishism or idolatry, she overlooks how these same dynamics exist in every tradition, including her own.

In "Faith and Knowledge", Derrida expands on this by exploring how the fetish operates at the intersection of life, death, repetition, and the sacred. He asks whether the often fetishized phallic symbol does not represent both the most vital sign of life and something that has become mechanical or automatic—something that survives even when life itself is absent (Derrida 2002b, pp. 83–85). This ambiguity—the tension between biological vitality and automation, between presence and absence—is central to Derrida's account of the fetish. It is not just a false idol. It is a structure of attachment, desire, and repetition that makes meaning possible. As Derrida puts it, this "unlimited fetishism" may actually form the basis of how a culture expresses its deepest reverence—its devotion to what it considers ultimate, sacred, or absolute, what he calls the "Thing itself" (ibid.).

Derrida's notion of "unlimited fetishism," suggests transhumanism is not uniquely idolatrous. Rather, it reveals what is already at work in all traditions: a desire to preserve, project, and relate to what exceeds us—whether we call it God, the soul, immortality, or the future. Derrida's thought invites us not to condemn this desire, but to understand its complexity. Instead of drawing hard lines between sacred and profane, or true and false religion, he urges us to reflect on the undecidable spaces in between—the places where what we create comes to carry more than we intended, and where our attachments point toward something still unconditional to-come.

4.2. *Fetishes in Transhumanism and Judaism*

In transhumanist thought, certain technologies—such as artificial intelligence, mind uploading, and digital immortality—often carry symbolic and emotional weight that goes far beyond their immediate utility. These are not just tools; they become *fetish-objects* in Derrida's sense: things that both supplement human limitations and represent a deferred promise of transformation or salvation.

Consider Ray Kurzweil's theory of the Singularity, which envisions a future where artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence, sparking an era of exponential change (Kurzweil 2005). For Kurzweil, the fusion of human and machine intelligence is not merely a technical milestone but a vision of transcendence—a fetish charged with hope, power, and the dream of overcoming death, frailty, and ignorance. Similarly, Giulio Prisco advocates digital immortality through consciousness uploading, framing the transfer of the mind to a

digital medium as a secular path to eternal life (Prisco 2013). Prisco's vision resembles a technological afterlife, offering salvation by preserving consciousness beyond bodily death. Nick Bostrom, meanwhile, identifies superintelligence as the evolutionary goal of humanity (Bostrom 2014), imagining a future where a superior AI might resolve existential risks and optimize consciousness itself. In each case, these technologies become more than mere enhancements—they are elevated to symbolic artifacts imbued with meaning, promise, and redemption.

For some, these technologies are not merely metaphors but deeply invested symbols—fetishes mediating desires, fears, and hopes for transcendence, control over mortality, and human perfection. Yet, as Derrida warns, fetishes risk hardening into idols when they cease to point beyond themselves and become objects of worship—symbols of certainty rather than sites of possibility. When concepts like AI, digital immortality, or the Singularity are treated as inevitable outcomes, the openness of the future collapses into a closed, deterministic narrative. Kurzweil's confident prediction of the Singularity by 2045 exemplifies this shift, transforming a speculative horizon into a rigid expectation (Kurzweil 2005, 2024). What begins as a fetish—an object of desire, ambiguity and deferral—can solidify into an idol, foreclosing critique and shutting down alternative imaginings.

In this way, technologies that began as fetishes—open-ended supplements to human limitation—risk becoming idols that foreclose critique, imagination, and alternative futures. Derrida's analysis invites us to remain vigilant: not to reject such technologies outright, but to resist the temptation to treat them as absolute, self-contained solutions. True ethical engagement with technology requires keeping the future open—to difference, delay, and the unpredictable arrival of what is still unconditionally to-come.

Judaism, like many traditions, employs physical objects that can be understood as fetish-objects—tangible things invested with symbolic, spiritual, or covenantal meaning. Items such as the *shofar*, *tallit*, *tefillin*, *mezuzah*, and *Torah* scroll serve as material mediators of divine relation, acting as powerful ritual aids that direct attention toward the sacred. The *shofar*, blown during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is not divine itself, but becomes a sonic and symbolic call to repentance and spiritual awakening. Similarly, *tefillin*—boxes containing Torah passages bound to the body—manifest the binding of divine commandments to thought and action. These objects materialize absence, anticipation, and the human longing for closeness to God. As even Derrida—who is himself Jewish—observes in “A Silkworm of One's Own” even the *tallit*, or prayer shawl, may be understood as a fetish-object: one that both veils and reveals, covering the body in a gesture that binds the worshipper to an absent, ungraspable divine presence (Derrida 2002a, pp. 350–52).

Importantly, Judaism acknowledges the danger that such objects might slip into *idolatry*—that they may become ends in themselves rather than conduits for relation. The classic example is the story of the Golden Calf, where the Israelites, impatient for Moses' return, construct a golden idol to worship (Exodus 32). This event becomes a foundational caution in Jewish thought about mistaking a physical object for God. Other prohibitions against graven images, or excessive veneration of the Temple or Ark, also reflect this concern. Yet Judaism does not reject the use of physical objects in spiritual practice; rather, it integrates them into a ritual economy that carefully navigates the tension between reverence and idolatry. Within this structure, such objects function as supplements in the Derridean sense—mediating forms that support covenantal relation while holding open a space for the divine that is never fully present, never fully possessed. They do not replace or contain God but help sustain a relationship to that which remains to come.

Transhumanist technologies like AI, mind-uploading, or the Singularity can function similarly—as fetishes representing hope, transformation, or redemption. However, these technological fetishes risk becoming *idols* when their symbolic power is treated as inevitable,

final, or absolute. As Derrida warns, a fetish becomes an idol when it closes off the ambiguity of absence and presents itself as the fulfillment of all longing. Judaism's ritual use of fetish objects—and its self-critical awareness of their limits—offers a helpful framework here: to hold space for reverence without collapsing into worship, to embrace symbolic mediation while resisting the illusion of completion.

5. Fetish, Hope, and the Risk of Closure

Technologies like AI and prosthetics function as supplements: they reveal human limits—bodily, cognitive, spiritual—while pointing toward something beyond. These tools are never final; they are evolving, fragile, and open-ended, structurally resembling religious supplements in both Christian and Jewish traditions. In Christianity, the figure of Jesus operates as a mediating presence that holds open the promise of transformation; in Judaism, ritual objects such as the shofar or tefillin serve as tangible mediators of covenantal relation without claiming to contain or represent the divine. In both cases, these forms mark absence, desire, and the hope for renewal. In this sense, technology becomes a kind of prosthesis—not a solution, but an extension that foregrounds human incompleteness and longing.

Derrida's notion of *différance* and the *à venir* helps us understand that ethical engagement with technology requires resisting claims of finality. When a fetish remains open—gesturing beyond itself—it resists becoming an idol. The danger arises when the supplement is mistaken for fulfillment itself. This is not a uniquely transhumanist risk. The Golden Calf story in the Torah is a longstanding warning: the temptation to worship what we have made, to confuse mediation with divinity. Derrida's deconstruction shows that fetishism is not simply a case of mistaken worship, but a necessary mode of relation—one marked by ambiguity, tension, and possibility. Fetishes are not automatically idols; they can serve as bridges to the unknown, the divine, or the still-to-come.

Tirosh-Samuelson has made important and timely contributions to the conversation on religion and transhumanism, particularly by drawing attention to the spiritual dimensions often overlooked in technoscientific discourse. Her framing of transhumanism as a “secularist faith” (Tirosh-Samuelson 2012) has opened space for rich theological reflection, and her work is invaluable for foregrounding the ethical and theological stakes of transhumanist aspirations. By confronting the salvationist language embedded in enhancement technologies, she offers a necessary provocation for scholars of religion and science alike. However, while her interpretation of transhumanism as a form of techno-idolatry is not without merit, it is often overreaching and lacks sufficient evidence. By conflating fetishism and idolization without adequately distinguishing their conceptual trajectories, her critique risks blurring important theoretical distinctions that would otherwise strengthen her argument.

Treating all techno-hope as mere hubristic techno-idolatry risks missing what both religion and transhumanism reveal: our deep, persistent longing for continuity, care, healing, and futurity. The future, as Derrida reminds us, is always *to-come*—a space of deferral, risk, and possibility. Fetishes help us mark this horizon. What matters is not to eliminate them, but to remain vigilant: to prevent our desires from hardening into dogmas, and our hopes from calcifying into idols. A nuanced engagement with transhumanism—like with religion—requires complexity, self-critique, and an openness to what we cannot yet foresee. Otherwise, we risk falling again into that golden trap the Torah has long warned us about.

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