

Cybergnosis: Digital Transcendence and the New Quest for Sacred Knowledge

Kibergnoza. Digitalna transcendencija i nova potraga za svetim znanjem

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Abstract

This article presents *Gnosticism* as a universal human aspiration toward transcendent knowledge rather than a historically bounded religious phenomenon or school of thought. From this perspective, the article examines how ancient patterns of knowledge-seeking manifest in contemporary digital environments. The concept of »*cybergnosis*« is introduced to describe the interaction between traditional wisdom-seeking behaviours and digital technologies. Through an analysis that spans early heresiological sources and contemporary scholarship—including the works of Michael Williams and Karen King—alongside examinations of cybertheory from William Gibson to current transhumanist movements, this study reveals a compelling paradox. While modern digital mind uploading projects and dreams of virtual reality may superficially resemble Gnostic aspirations for liberation from physical constraints, they instead constitute an inversion of authentic *gnosis*. Whereas Valentinus taught in Fragment H that the Son's revelation purifies the heart so that 'blessed is the one who has such a heart, for they shall see God' (Valentinus, Fragment H; Clement, Strom. 2.114.6), linking self-knowledge directly to divine vision, contemporary »*cybergnostics*« pursue technological escape as a form of utility. The article concludes that cybergnosticism represents not the fulfilment but the displacement of genuine *gnosis*, as humanity's pursuit of transformation becomes diminished through digital simulations that emulate rather than achieve true enlightenment.

Keywords: Gnosticism, cyberspace, mind upload, transcendence, knowledge, escapism

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Sažetak

Članak prikazuje gnosticizam kao oblik univerzalne ljudske težnje prema transcendentnom znanju, a ne kao povijesno ograničen religijski fenomen ili školu mišljenja. Iz te perspektive članak ispituje kako se drevni obrasci traženja znanja manifestiraju u suvremenom digitalnom okružju. Koncept »kibergnoze« uводи se kako bi se opisala interakcija između tradicionalnih puteva traženja mudrosti i digitalnih tehnologija. Kroz analizu koja obuhvaća rane hereziološke izvore i suvremenu znanost – uključujući djela Michaela Williamsa i Karen King – uz ispitivanja kibernetičke teorije Williama Gibsona do suvremenih transhumanističkih pokreta, ova studija otkriva uvjerljiv paradoks. Dok moderni projekti digitalnog učitavanja uma i snovi o virtualnoj stvarnosti mogu površno nalikovati gnostičkim težnjama za oslobođenjem od fizičkih ograničenja, oni umjesto toga predstavljaju inverziju autentične gnoze. Dok je Valentin u Fragmentu H učio da Sinova objava pročišćava srce tako da je 'blažen onaj koji ima takvo srce jer će Boga vidjeti' (Valentinus, Fragment H; Clement, Strom. 2.114.6), povezujući samospoznaju izravno s božanskom vizijom, suvremeni »kibergnosticici« teže tehnološkom bijegu kao obliku korisnosti. Članak zaključuje da kibergnosticizam ne predstavlja ispunjenje već zamjenu istinske gnoze jer se ljudska težnja za transformacijom smanjuje digitalnim simulacijama koje oponašaju umjesto da postižu istinsko prosvjetljenje.

Ključne riječi: gnosticizam, kiberprostor, *upload* uma, transcendencija, znanje, eskapizam

Introduction

The study of Gnosticism is among the most complex areas in religious studies. It has undergone numerous transformations throughout history and scholarly research. Some have declared it a heresy, others regard it as a movement within Christianity, and still others view it as a philosophical school or way of life. Some claim that Gnosticism, as a category, does not exist or fails to correspond to the nature of what it purports to represent. From early heresiological sources to contemporary academic debates, »Gnosticism« remains in a constant state of methodological evolution and reinterpretation.

This article approaches Gnosticism differently. Rather than focusing on historical definitions or essentialist classifications, it treats Gnosticism as a *keyword* encapsulating the universal human aspiration toward knowledge that transcends conventional frameworks—beyond the boundaries of existing academic and esoteric interpretations. Nevertheless, certain interpretative traditions and the history of research on Gnosticism will also be addressed, as they form an essential backdrop that cannot be dismissed. This perspective allows for the recognition of »Gnostic patterns« across diverse historical contexts, including in contemporary digital environments.

Human beings possess a biological foundation for knowledgeseeking, from early childhood through to late life. We are inherently curious and persistently driven to acquire knowledge, both consciously and unconsciously. Frequently, we remain unaware of how much knowledge we absorb through various interactions and media channels, often conflating *knowledge* with mere *information*. This distinction between information and knowledge implies that what is traditionally designated as »Gnostic« may represent a universal feature of human cognition rather than an attribute confined to religious movements.

In the digital era, this universal quest for knowledge manifests in new forms that require theoretical frameworks capable of connecting ancient wisdom traditions with modern technological practices. Some scholars suggest that humanity continues to search for heaven—and that some may have discovered its approximation within cyberspace. This article takes the idea further by introducing the concept of *cybergnosis*. This term describes the manifestation of humanity's timeless pursuit of knowledge within digital environments, where algorithms function as modern counterparts to hidden esoteric systems, where virtual communities generate new epistemic authorities, and where artificial intelligence reveals patterns extending beyond human comprehension.

This theoretical approach neither denies the historical and cultural specificities of Gnostic texts nor undermines their contextual significance; instead, it situates them within the broader trajectory of human epistemic evolution. Moreover, it creates opportunities to examine modern digital phenomena through the analytical lens of ancient wisdom traditions without succumbing to either anachronism or essentialism.

This analysis draws primarily on Valentinian sources. Valentinus's authentic Greek fragments, preserved in patristic citations (particularly Fragment H in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.114.3-6), establish that gnosis is fundamentally about the revelation of the Father through the Son, whereby 'the heart becomes pure' and 'blessed is the one who has such a heart, for they shall see God.' The Gospel of Truth (NHC I,3) develops this further, teaching that 'knowledge of the Father destroys ignorance' (Gos. Truth 18:10-11; 24:30-32). As Rudolph notes, Valentinus's system 'sees itself as the abolition of »ignorance« that arose from error in the Pleroma, through »knowledge«; this is simultaneously an act of knowledge and salvation.' From these sources, I identify the following structural features of the gnostic pattern: (1) gnosis as revelatory knowledge of divine origin, (2) ignorance as existential imprisonment,

(3) self-knowledge as ontological transformation, (4) salvation through insight rather than mere information. These features serve as analogical tools for examining digital phenomena, not as claims of direct historical continuity.«

1. Approaches to Understanding Gnosticism

The earliest records of the Gnostics and Gnosticism appear in the writings of the Church Fathers and early apologists, who typically classified such individuals and groups as heretical or heterodox, presenting them as threats to the doctrinal integrity of the early Church. It is important to remember that, at that time, the biblical canon was still in formation and that Christianity, as we know it today, was substantially different. Numerous groups called themselves *Christian*, and recent studies show that they all regarded themselves as both rightful and righteous (Ehrman 2003, 15, 172–179). Nevertheless, the heresiological foundations established by the Fathers continue to influence contemporary scholarship in ways that both illuminate and distort our understanding of ancient knowledge-seeking communities.

Among the most cited authors are *Justin Martyr* (c. 100–165 CE), who produced some of the earliest systematic descriptions of what would later be identified as *Gnostic* groups. His *First Apology* (Justin 2012, 26.1–3) and *Dialogue with Trypho* (Justin 2011, 35) describe Simon Magus and his followers in a way that established stereotypical themes later perpetuated in successive heresiological literature. *Irenaeus of Lyon* (c. 130–202 CE) marks the culmination of early heresiological writing with his monumental *Adversus Haereses* (*Against Heresies*). In this work, Irenaeus demonstrates intimate familiarity with the groups he condemned, suggesting either direct contact with or access to their writings—a point debated extensively by modern scholars. Nevertheless, Irenaeus’s descriptions of Valentinian cosmology and ritual practice remain invaluable, even as he portrays these groups as dangerous deviations from orthodox Christianity. His genealogical classification of the various sects created the impression of coherent schools of thought where there may have been greater diversity.

Two additional Church Fathers are particularly significant: *Hippolytus of Rome* (c. 170–235 CE), whose *Refutation of All Heresies* engages deeply with Greek philosophical sources and demonstrates broad intellectual familiarity; and *Epiphanius of Salamis* (c. 315–403 CE), whose *Panarion* expands upon earlier works, particularly those of Irenaeus. Epiphanius, writing much later, provides evidence of the persistence and development of heresiological categorisation over several centuries.

The term »Gnosticism« itself emerged only in the seventeenth century. Henry More coined and employed it in his *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches* (1669) to describe the groups criticised by St John in the *Book of Revelation* (Layton 1995, 335). Scholars of Gnosticism were scarce at this time. Yet, Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), founder of the Tübingen School, made one of the earliest significant contributions to this field through his *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religionsphilosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1835). Baur interpreted Gnosticism as a form of religious philosophy and as a necessary step in the dialectical evolution of Christian thought. His work laid the foundation for subsequent debates that continue to the present.

Among later prominent scholars were Adolf von Harnack, Richard Reitzenstein, Wilhelm Bousset, and Hans Jonas. The discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* texts in 1945 inaugurated a new era of research, culminating in the Messina Conference of 1966—*The Origins of Gnosticism: Colloquium in Messina, 13–18 April 1966*. This attempt to formulate a precise definition distinguishing Gnosticism from other contemporary religious movements ultimately failed to achieve consensus and came to symbolise the limitations of essentialist approaches.

Modern scholars such as Michael Williams and Karen King have offered important critiques of these essentialist frameworks. Williams argues that the label »Gnosticism« obscures rather than clarifies understanding of diverse texts, suggesting the alternative term »biblical demiurgical traditions« (Williams 1996, 51). King similarly contends that the category's heresiological heritage makes it inherently polemical, as it reproduces ancient divisions between orthodoxy and heresy (King 2003, 222–224). Meanwhile, Einar Thomassen, in his *There is No Such Thing as Gnosticism* (2019), proposes that the concept of Gnosticism as a unified phenomenon with essential characteristics should be abandoned altogether. Thomassen suggests three modes of study—a historical approach (to explore intergroup relationships), a thematic approach (to analyse shared motifs), and a macrohistorical approach (to contextualise writings within the broader evolution of human consciousness).

Earlier, Elaine Pagels, in *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979), identified three major directions in the study of Gnosticism: (1) the relationship between Gnosticism and Hellenistic philosophy (advanced by scholars such as Jonas, Nock, Armstrong, Layton, and Attridge); (2) literarycritical studies of Gnostic texts, pioneered by Robinson and Koester and extended by Tardieu, Schottroff, Perkins, and MacRae; and (3) analyses of Gnosticism's relationship to early Christian

thought, undertaken by scholars including Grant, Yamauchi, Wilson, Stead, Chadwick, and others (Pagels 1979, XXXIII–XXXIV).

Contemporary scholarship, shaped by figures such as David Brakke, John D. Turner, Bentley Layton, and Nicola Denzey Lewis, continues to redefine the field by emphasising diversity within early Christianity and engaging critically with issues of identity, orthodoxy, and pluralism. Brakke's work on early Christian asceticism and Athanasius's rhetoric, alongside Pagels's reinterpretations of the *Nag Hammadi* corpus, illustrates a shift from theological classification to a broader cultural and intellectual history of Gnostic thought.

Parallel to this academic trajectory, a more esoteric or personal approach to Gnosticism has persisted. Authors such as *Helena Blavatsky*, *G.R.S. Mead*, and *John Lamb Lash* consider Gnosticism part of a perennial wisdom tradition that transcends cultural boundaries and epochs. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) situates Gnosticism within an ancient universal philosophy, while Mead's *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1900) interprets it as an authentic remnant of early Christianity focused on personal spiritual experience rather than institutional dogma. Lash, in *Not in His Image: Gnostic Vision, Sacred Ecology, and the Future of Belief* (2006), extends this line of thought, presenting Gnosticism as an ecological and cosmological knowledge tradition originating from pre-Christian mystery schools.

Although often lacking the rigour of modern academic methodology, these esoteric perspectives highlight Gnosticism's enduring role as a vehicle for humanity's search for transcendent knowledge. When examined together, the academic and esoteric approaches reveal shared patterns, supporting the thesis that Gnosticism represents not a fixed doctrine but a recurrent framework for humanity's epistemic and spiritual aspirations.

For the purposes of this analysis, *Gnosticism* will thus be employed in its broadest sense—as a universal mode of knowledgeseeking, a way humanity attempts to comprehend metaphysical and transcendent dimensions of existence. This expanded definition allows identification of *Gnostic patterns* across cultural and historical contexts without depending on rigid or essentialist boundaries. It also enables the interpretation of modern phenomena, particularly those involving digital technologies, through the lens of ancient wisdom traditions. From this perspective, Gnostic traditions may be seen not simply as religious innovations but as sophisticated models of human information processing—concepts that can illuminate modern explorations of consciousness and digital epistemology.

2. Cyber(space)

Having established how Gnosticism will be approached in this paper, it is equally necessary to define the terminology surrounding *cyberspace*. The term *cyber* originates from the ancient Greek word κυβερνήτης (*kybernētēs*), meaning *steersman* or *helmsman* (Etymology Online). Today, the prefix *cyber-* is used in an array of compound terms such as *cyberpunk*, *cybernetics*, and *cyberspace*, among others. In 1996, *The New York Times* observed that the prefix had become a fashionable linguistic element—«a cool prefix»—precisely because its meaning had grown vague enough to be universally adaptable (Etymology Online). In these new formations, *cyber-* often conveys a sense of concealment, mystery, or mischievous intent—particularly evident in genres like *cyberpunk*.

The term *cyberspace* is generally credited to William Gibson, who first used it in his 1982 short story *Burning Chrome*. In modern usage, *cyberspace* came to signify »going online,« particularly during the formative years of the internet. Early users frequently described the experience as entering an entirely new realm—an unregulated domain where seemingly anything was possible.

Gibson's conception of cyberspace was that of a »*virtual data landscape*«, navigated through »*computergenerated threedimensional illusionism*« (Wertheim 2010, 232). In this landscape, »the data resources of global corporations were represented as architectural structures: the data bank of the Mitsubishi Bank, for example, was a set of green cubes, while that of the Fission Authority was a scarlet pyramid« (Wertheim 2010, 232). Cyberspace is thus imagined as a vivid *topography of information*: a virtual world composed of geometries, trajectories, and light—what Murphy (2024, 13) terms »*abstract geometries, colours, shapes, and velocities*.« Gibson's depictions reflect the computer graphics of his time yet also evoke a deeper philosophical tension between physical and virtual existence.

Gibson famously describes cyberspace as »*the bodiless exultation of cyberspace*« (Murphy 2024, 42), a phrase that resonates with distinctly Gnostic overtones. In *Burning Chrome*, the protagonists experience their transcendence vividly: »Bodiless, we swerve into Chrome's castle of ice [...] Somewhere we have bodies, very far away, in a crowded loft roofed with steel and glass« (Murphy 2024, 42). Here, Gibson frames the physical body as »*meat*«—a limited vessel to be transcended. The body becomes symbolic of constraint, while the digital realm emerges as a space of freedom, echoing ancient dualisms. The »*console cowboys*« of Gibson's works thus represent modern spiritual voyagers—seekers of liberation through immersion in the digital matrix.

Margaret Wertheim, in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* (2010), expands on Gibson's vision, suggesting that the *matrix* could be seen as a new kind of metaphysical space—a *digital heaven*. She writes that cyberspace is »projected by the power of computergenerated threedimensional illusionism into a virtual data landscape,« one in which corporate information forms entire architectural environments. This framing of cyberspace as a *heavenly space* laid the conceptual groundwork for what Don Iannone later termed *digital spirituality*: »an unforeseen outcome of the use of digital tools and virtual environments by spiritual seekers and practitioners« (Iannone 2021).

Iannone identifies two »faces« of digital spirituality. The first—what he calls the *problematic face*—uses technology as an escape from the human condition rather than as a means to improve it. This *cyberescapism* manifests today in the increasing tendency to substitute physical relationships with exclusively digital interactions. Each day, countless young people retreat into online spaces, seeking connection and transcendence while paradoxically becoming more isolated. Gibson's disembodied cybernauts thus anticipate a cultural reality in which the pursuit of freedom through technology results in deeper forms of confinement and alienation.

The Cartesian and Gnostic echoes in this phenomenon are unmistakable. Gibson, much like Descartes or Ryle before him, explores the mind–body dichotomy at its extreme in *Neuromancer*: the body as prison, the mind as navigator. Humanity's enduring preoccupation with overcoming mortality, discovering inner divinity, and understanding the nature of the soul persists—only now refracted through digital and technological metaphors. What had been mythological or theological narratives of transcendence have evolved into *technological* dreams of transcendence.

Modern transhumanist movements and digital consciousness theorists pursue these same aspirations under scientific guises. They propose methods for *mind uploading*, *consciousness transfer*, and even *indefinite life extension* (Moshe 2014, 64, 87, 106, 107). Virtual and augmented reality now promise transformative experiences that blur the line between material and immaterial existence. Films such as *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) illustrate this imagination vividly: a man achieves godlike power within virtual reality through technological experimentation. What appears to be spiritual awakening becomes, in truth, a mediated illusion—a psychological parallel to the promise of cyberimmortality.

Gibson's recurring vision of consciousness »downloaded into digital eternity« (Wertheim 2010, 259–60) anticipates presentday debates on artificial con-

sciousness. This fantasy of technological immortality is, as Wertheim argues, »an attempt to reenvision the soul in digital form«—itself a continuation of ancient Pythagorean and Platonic attempts to equate spirit with ordered pattern and mathematical harmony (Wertheim 2010, 268–69).

Scholars such as Martine Rothblatt and Susan Schneider extend these discussions. Rothblatt (2015, 17) defines *cyberconsciousness* as »a continuum of softwarebased, humanlevel autonomy and empathy.« She foregrounds the preservation of individuality as technological systems evolve. Schneider (2021, 37–38; 16–32; 82–87) explores the ethical and philosophical consequences of creating conscious digital entities. She identifies the »*reduplication problem*«—the dilemma that digital replicas may copy but never truly *transfer* the original consciousness, thereby fracturing personal identity.

In parallel, theologian HansDieter Mutschler introduces the »*God Machine*« concept: a framework for understanding how modern technology assumes quasidivine status. He contends that, since the Industrial Revolution, humanity’s growing mastery over nature—and its creation of artificial worlds—has produced a subtle form of cryptoreligiosity. Through technology, humans unwittingly replace the divine with the digital, reshaping metaphysical categories into mechanistic ones (Wan 2023). This insight helps explain why artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and cyberspace so frequently adopt religious or transcendental language: they *evoke* the sacred, even as they secularise it.

Schneider, conversely, warns that in our eagerness to simulate consciousness, we risk constructing systems without true sentience: »sophisticated but nonconscious AIs« born of economic expedience rather than metaphysical inquiry. She cautions against a dystopian »*cheapening out on consciousness*,« where moral consideration lags behind computational advancement (Schneider 2021, 37–38). In this sense, both Mutschler’s *God Machine* and Schneider’s work converge on a shared anxiety: the displacement of spiritual development by technological ambition.

These dynamics recall Iannone’s warning that digital spirituality could »shift in an alarming way to the cultivation of the spiritual life of AI agents« rather than nurturing human spiritual growth (Iannone 2021). As Wertheim (2010, 267) observes, metaphors equating mind to software remain profoundly inadequate: human memory, intuition, and temporality defy algorithmic reproduction. Thus, contemporary talk of digital transcendence reveals both fascination and fragility—the persistence of the Gnostic urge to transcend, yet hollowed by the utilitarian logic of code.

This discussion leads naturally to the concept of cybergnosticism, a topic further explored in the following section. The merging of mystical aspiration and technological progress represents a defining paradox of the modern era: humanity, in striving to replicate spirit through data, risks erasing the very essence of gnosis it seeks to preserve.

3. Cybergnosticism

The digital consciousness projects discussed in the previous section—both human and AI-focused—can be interpreted through the conceptual lens of *cybergnosticism*. The term, while superficially reminiscent of ancient Gnostic insights, in fact reveals a profound reorientation of human spiritual priorities, often unnoticed in contemporary discourse.

The term *cybergnosticism* was first used by Os Guinness in his 1994 book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It*, in which he writes:

»How can we keep virtual reality virtual? Is it possible that tomorrow's technologies will allow us to slip the leash of mundane reality enough to create the illusion of a reality beyond rootedness? Cybergnosticism would be the outcome of such flights of fancy, for the ultimate VR experience of the future will aim to be spiritually sublime.« (Guinness 1995, 130)

Guinness's observation positions *cybergnosticism* within a theological critique of technologically mediated spirituality, which he viewed as anti-Christian and ultimately regressive. He identified in early promises of virtual reality (VR) a privileging of mind over body—«the enhancement of the mind at the expense of the body, to the point where the body becomes optional.» For Guinness, VR signified humanity's attempt to achieve transcendence through artificially constructed experience rather than organic faith. However, while his position recognised the potential dangers of *digital mysticism*, it did not investigate the deeper structural parallels between ancient Gnosticism and contemporary technology-driven spirituality.

Subsequent thinkers expanded the term's scope and critical utility. Graham J.G. Hill, in his 2004 Master's dissertation *Cybergnosticism? A Study of Contemporary Christian Faith Communities in Cyberspace*, analysed whether digitally mediated Christian communities manifested Gnostic tendencies. He proposed three comparative dimensions: disembodiment (building on Groothuis 1997, 89), construction of self (after Gackenbach 1998, 40–41), and individualised existence and experience (following Ess 2001, 4). Hill's framework revealed

that although certain online religious practices adopted Gnosticlike characteristics—particularly the abstraction of embodiment—they also contradicted essential Gnostic principles such as the centrality of knowledge as liberation. Hill concluded that designating these networks as *cyberGnostic* would be an overstatement, as authentic Christian theology remained grounded in physical embodiment and communal presence (Hill 2004, 101).

Another important contribution came from Oliver Krueger in his article »*Gnosis in Cyberspace? Body, Mind and Progress in Posthumanism*« (2005). Krueger examined the philosophical divergences between ancient Gnosticism and posthumanist thought, noting the risks of superficial analogy. He warned against interpreting every form of mind–body dualism or utopian virtuality through »wellbeloved Gnostic or Platonic glasses« (Krueger 2005, 78). For Krueger, posthuman reasoning does not seek spiritual transcendence; it is primarily utilitarian, grounded in functional progression and efficiency rather than soteriological aspiration.

He argued persuasively that in the posthumanist context, the human body is deemed obsolete not because it is evil, but because it is inefficient—its biological neural processing simply too slow compared to electronic computation (Krueger 2005, 85). This logic recasts transcendence in pragmatic rather than metaphysical terms: liberation through speed and control, not enlightenment. As he summarises, »our bodies are not obsolete because they are ethically evil [...] the reasoning is completely different.« (Krueger 2005, 85). Thus, where ancient Valentinians sought reunion with divine fullness (pleroma), as the Gospel of Truth describes the return from ignorance to knowledge of the Father (Gos. Truth 22:20-37), where revelation 'brings return from error' and reunites the fragmented with the whole.

Krueger's analysis grounds *cybergnosticism* not in theology but in philosophy and cybernetics, emphasising that what appears spiritually motivated is in fact technologically rationalised. Here, the quest for transcendence is replaced by a pursuit of technical efficiency, echoing the broader human impulse to transcend limitations through data, design, and code. Yet, as Krueger notes, this shift from metaphysical salvation to instrumental enhancement leaves humanity suspended in what might be called a *digital limbo*—seeking transcendence, yet confined within computation's logic.

This gives rise to a critical paradox: *cybergnosticism* functions not as the continuation of traditional Gnosticism but as its inversion. The bodymind separation remains central but emptied of its spiritual dimension. Valentinians pursued liberation through knowledge that 'destroys ignorance' (Gos.

Truth 18:10-11), embodying the principle of *gnōthi seauton* as ontological transformation rather than mere self-examination, *cybergnosticism* replaces introspection with control: the manipulation of data, identity, and simulated consciousness.

In this sense, *cybergnosticism* is less a spiritual movement than a philosophical condition—a reflection of humanity's altered relationship to knowledge, embodiment, and transcendence under digital modernity. It encapsulates a human desire for reincarnation in informational rather than metaphysical form—a faith in digital continuity shorn of divine grace.

Thus, contemporary *cybergnosticism* can be understood as a secular gnosis of utility, one in which salvation has been redefined as perpetual optimisation. The *gnostic* aspiration has survived not in theology but in code, reborn as a metaphysics of computation. This recognition invites reflection on the broader question: whether humanity, in constructing technologies that simulate divine capacities, is advancing toward enlightenment—or merely reinventing ancient illusions in algorithmic form.

Conclusion

Classical Gnosticism emphasised the imperative of *gnōthi seauton*—«know thyself»—and aspired to liberation from the material body, which was perceived as corrupt or illusory. In contrast, contemporary projects surrounding minduploading and digital transcendence present a paradoxical duality. These modern endeavours do not regard the body as morally deficient or inherently evil; rather, they view it as a functional mechanism that can be enhanced, replicated, or replaced. The body becomes a biological platform, a system constrained by outdated specifications.

The ethical shifts that accompany this transformation reveal a movement from moral to functional evolution. Technological determinism supplants spiritual introspection; optimisation replaces contemplation. Ancient Gnostics perceived the liberation of the soul as a pathway to divine reunion, whereas contemporary *cybergnostics* pursue the extension of life and experience, elevating utility above transcendence.

This redefinition of salvation reflects both continuity and distortion. Humanity retains the Gnostic impulse to transcend physical limitation, yet the goal has changed: eternal illumination gives way to digital persistence. We observe this same logic in the commodification of immortality and the reduction of personhood to code—*the soul rendered as data*.

At its core, this transformation represents the inversion of ancient belief. What was once a metaphysical ascent has become an engineering endeavour. Modern society exhibits a *reconceptualised Cartesian dualism*—one that replaces the divine with the digital. Consciousness is imagined as informational essence, detached from corporeal experience and available for duplication or transfer.

However, unlike the Gnostics' quest for unity with the divine, this digital transcendence lacks *soteriological urgency*. Faith in technology's corrective power supersedes the desire for metaphysical insight. Humanity seeks not immortality through enlightenment but upgrades through code. Where Gnostics found salvation in spiritual transformation, posthumanity finds fulfilment in technical perfection—*version 2.0 of the self*.

This paradox stems from viewing consciousness as a computational pattern rather than a spiritual reality. In this new order, being becomes function, and mystery becomes data. The modern figure of the *cybergnostic* seeks distraction rather than revelation—transitioning from ancient *mystery schools* to new *mystery machines*. The outcome is not transformation but simulation: the imitation of transcendence as an aesthetic experience.

While ancient Gnostics framed selfknowledge as an ontological turning toward the divine, digital man turns outward, pursuing mastery of systems rather than mastery of self. Every technological advance appears to promise liberation yet engenders dependency; every network promises connection yet deepens isolation. Knowledge, once the means to transformation, now risks becoming information without wisdom—an accumulation without awakening.

In this light, *cybergnosticism* emerges not as the culmination of Gnostic tradition but as its displacement. Where the Valentinian pattern emphasized gnosis as revelatory knowledge leading to ontological transformation, digital culture substitutes technological utility for spiritual depth. It reflects humanity's continued pursuit of revelation through artificial means, yet bereft of the spiritual depth that once imbued it with meaning. If ancient Gnostics sought to transcend illusion, digital humanity appears content to inhabit its most sophisticated form.

Ultimately, the irony of *cybergnosticism* lies in its success: humankind has achieved the technical separation of mind and body that the Gnostics imagined—but at the cost of forgetting why that separation was desired. Salvation and spirituality risk obsolescence in this machinic age, unless the phenomenon is recognised, named, and critically engaged. Perhaps that recognition itself can mark the first step toward recovering true *gnosis* within a digital cosmos.

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