

## Research Article

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# Ethics and Technology: An Analysis of *Rick and Morty*

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**Abstract:** In this article, we argue that the animated TV-show *Rick and Morty* depicts several important and relevant themes about the impact of technology in contemporary societies. By using certain concepts and ideas from the philosophy of technology, especially from thinkers like Jacques Ellul, Jacques Derrida, Neil Postman, and George Ritzer, we investigate how this show brings to the fore certain ontological and ethical assumptions and problems that stem from the advance of technology. We shall use the term *technopolitical thinking* to refer to these core assumptions and principles which are inherent in contemporary technological societies. By providing various examples from certain episodes and scenes of the show, we shall illustrate how this animated series can provide a basis for a more extensive discussion.

**Keywords:** philosophy of technology, uniqueness/repeatability, McDonaldization, mechanization, technopoly

## 1 Introduction

*Rick and Morty* is an animated show, created by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland, and it is about a grandfather–grandson duo, embarking on a series of fast-paced, high-tech, and absurd adventures. Rick, often represented as the smartest man in the universe, is a master of technology; throughout the series, he develops gadgets that allow him to stop time, teleport, store and erase memories, make animals smarter, access infinitely many TV-channels, turn himself into a pickle, and so on. He usually carries along with his grandson Morty to his adventures, who is an emotional and angsty teenager on the brink of puberty. During various episodes, other members of Rick’s family tag along too; his daughter Beth, his son-in-law Jerry and his granddaughter, Summer. Beth is a “horse-surgeon,” who takes after his father in terms of a scientific and objective attitude to life, whereas Jerry is an emotional, insecure, and unemployed husband. Summer represents certain features of a new generation, always on the phone, obsessed with self-image and popularity, often cruel and deeply in need of emotional support.

At times Morty or other members of the family serve as humane counterparts to Rick’s objective-scientific attitude. Sometimes they come into conflict, and sometimes they share moments of bliss and genuine connection. The show provides ample material for many philosophical and scientific issues and problems, such as determinism-freedom, artificial intelligence, identity, alternate universes, sentient existence, animal rights, religion, commodification, slavery, narratives, and meta-narratives. In fact, each episode can be said to tackle a specific philosophical or ethical issue.

The scope of one paper will not be enough to do justice to each of these issues; for this reason, we shall limit our discussion to one strand of thought about technology that is present throughout the series. We will

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attempt to show that *Rick and Morty* presents, among various other issues, specific implications of an ontology and ethics based on highly advanced technology.

Our starting point will be Neil Postman's conception of "technopoly," which he defines as a "totalitarian technocracy," meaning that technology comes to define and determine our societies at an ever-increasing rate and intensity. As Postman puts it, the thought-world of technopoly includes the beliefs that:

[...] the primary, if not the only goal of human labor and thought is efficiency, that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment; that in fact human judgment cannot be trusted, because it is plagued by laxity, ambiguity and unnecessary complexity; that subjectivity is an obstacle to clear thinking, that what cannot be measured either does not exist or is of no value; and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts.<sup>1</sup>

We shall argue that the character "Rick" represents what we may call "technopolitical thinking," which can be defined as a way of thinking which endorses and augments these tenets of the thought-world of technopoly in various domains. We shall examine episodes and themes which bring out this way of thinking in two broad categories: the ontological and the ethical. That being said, Rick is a more complicated character than he seems. We shall claim that Rick is usually presented as a character who both instigates and augments technopolitical thought, but also resists or becomes a victim of the very thing that he puts forward.

Concurrently, the other main character, Morty, can be said to represent a more traditional way of thinking; emotional, complicated, and ambivalent.<sup>2</sup> Morty is constantly shocked and mesmerized by what Rick can do with his scientific genius. The interaction between these two ways of thinking forms the basis of narrative development and the central point of tension for the entire series. Another significant aspect of Morty is his obsession with his platonic crush, Jessica, a popular and beautiful teenage girl at his school. In many episodes, Morty's love for Jessica is what drives the narrative, as the ultimate source of meaning and purpose.<sup>3</sup>

As we shall see, technopolitical thinking is usually an attempt to criticize or erode traditional approaches to meaning and purpose. One way to do this would be to show that what we consider as unique is, in fact, repeatable or replaceable. This idea presupposes a certain ontology that is presupposed by technopolitical thought.

One of the most basic features of this ontology is the attempt to reduce or transform uniqueness into repetition or replacement. This way of thinking considers memories, feelings, experiences (those things which we believe to be unique/unrepeatable) as events or pieces of information that can be transferred, stored, separated, repeated, replaced, or erased. There are both ontological and ethical consequences to this approach, and in this article, we provide examples as to how this shows highlights those consequences. We shall be focusing specifically on uniqueness, repetition, and replaceability in the next section.

In the third section of our article, we shall be using Ritzer's concept of McDonaldization, a term coined in response to and as a continuation of Jacques Ellul's critique of the technological society. McDonaldization is also a concept that brings together the ontological and ethical dimensions of

<sup>1</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout our discussion we contrast technopolitical thought with traditional thought. By traditional thought we mean a pre-modern, pre-technological understanding of the world, which is "organized by customs that admit a fundamental ambivalence as to how nature works." (Clarke, "Consumption and the City," 74). In this context, technopolitical thought may be considered as an augmentation and expansion of the modern mindset which seeks to overthrow this ambivalence and insist on the claim that, eventually, science will find all the required explanations for how nature (as well as humans) work. For further details see Clarke, "Consumption and the City." We would like to thank Reviewer #2 for this suggestion.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, in the episode *Edge of Tomorty: Rick Die Rickpeat*, we see him being obsessed with the idea of having Jessica near him when he dies. Rick takes Morty to a planet called Forbodulon Prime, where they gather death crystals. By using these crystals a person is able to foresee the way they are going to die, but one has to follow a certain path in life in order to reach that end. Throughout the episode, Morty's obsession makes him destroy everything else – including a possible relationship with Jessica. *Rick and Morty*, See *Edge of Tomorty: Rick Die Rickpeat*. Directed by Wesley Archer and Erica Hayes. Written by Mike McMahan. Adult Swim, 10 November 2019.

technopolitical thinking, so it will be useful in pointing out its ethical implications. In order to do that, Bentham's *felicific calculus* in relation to Ritzer's, Postman's, and Ellul's concepts will be briefly introduced as well.

## 2 Rick and the ontology of technopolitical thought

Rick's technopolitical mindset can be summed up as the following:

- (1) It augments and is subjected to technological determination,
- (2) It rejects that value-making properties are inherent in things themselves, hence
- (3) It erodes traditional/historical relationalities as well as moral and social obligations that are based on shared values.<sup>4</sup>

By technological determination, we mean a certain historical development that has especially gained intensity and velocity in the last 200 years. Our sense of meaning and purpose provided by traditional systems of value such as family, religion, community, or national identity has been transformed by technique. As a result, technology is becoming an end in itself. We have started to invent things just for the sake of inventing them. This is what Max Weber had in mind when he wrote about disenchantment:

[Increasing intellectualization and rationalization] means the knowledge or belief that if we only wanted to we could learn at any time that there are, in principle, no mysterious unpredictable forces in play, but that all things – in principle – can be controlled through calculation. This, however, means the disenchantment of the world. No longer, like the savage, who believed that such forces existed, do we have to resort to magical means to gain control over or pray to the spirits. Technical means and calculation work for us instead.<sup>5</sup>

Nowadays, due to the processes of reduction, elimination, and dissemination, we are able to copy, codify, transfer, or erase various kinds of information. These processes have started to eliminate those aspects of life that we thought were unique and unrepeatable such as memories, experiences, feelings, relationships etc. We cherish memories, people, or social bonds because we believe them not to be replaceable or repeatable. Uniqueness attributes a certain value to our experiences and relations with others. With Rick, however, the situation is different, since he can access infinite alternate universes and he can find another Beth, another Morty, even another Rick who has more-or-less the same characteristics. Alternatively, he can invent a gadget which allows him to capture even the most unique events or experiences.

As a consequence of this way of thinking, represented by Rick, we have witnessed a transformation of traditional forms of value and meaning that have stemmed from our long-lasting attachment to the idea that uniqueness is a major source of value. This is why technopolitical thought presumes that value-making properties are not inherent in things themselves. The reduction or transformation of all aspects of life into mere quantifications results in a loss of uniqueness.

If, one day, it turns out that our memories and experiences can be separated, stored, and relived again, this would change our entire self-conception and the value systems that we endorse. Technopolitical thinking heralds the coming of this kind of transformation. We are forced into a way of thinking which presumes that to find an appropriate and efficient solution, there must be a numeric counterpart to our problems. Can we precisely measure our fatigue, our sadness, our joy, or our traumas? Can we devise solutions to our most basic and human problems via different versions of the *felicific calculus*? Jacques Ellul

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<sup>4</sup> (2) is argued as a reason for (3), because one of the most common claims Rick makes is that the concepts that are valued by most people including Morty are simply meaningless social constructions as they in fact do not possess value-making properties. What is broadly referred to as “traditional/historical” in (3) is trivialized as such. This point will be supported by further arguments throughout the following passages.

<sup>5</sup> Weber, “Science,” 35.

draws our attention to this way of thinking which suggests that every aspect of our lives are subject to quantification:

[...] only that is knowable which is expressed (or, at least, can be expressed) in numbers. To get away from the so-called “arbitrary and subjective,” to escape ethical or literary judgments (which, as everyone knows, are trivial and unfounded), the scientist must get back to numbers. What, after all, can one hope to deduce from the purely qualitative statement that the worker is fatigued? But when biochemistry makes it possible to measure fatigability numerically, it is at last possible to take account of the worker’s fatigue. Then there is hope of finding a solution.<sup>6</sup>

Ellul is, of course, critical of this transformation and Postman follows suit in criticizing this way of thought. Broadly speaking, *Rick and Morty* represent the objective and subjective points of view, respectively. Before getting into the ethical implications of this way of thinking, let us focus on what precisely are the assumptions and basic concepts through which we can understand the ontological background of technopolitical thought.

In his writings, Jacques Derrida refers to an ontological tension between irreplaceable uniqueness and machine-like repeatability. These concepts will help identify specific features of technopolitical thought. In his text *Typewriter Ribbon*, Derrida poses the question of the relation between event and mechanism:

Will we one day be able, and in a single gesture, to join the thinking of the event to the thinking of the machine? Will we be able to think, what is called thinking, at one and the same time, both what is happening (we call that an event) and the calculable programming of an automatic repetition (we call that a machine)? For that, it would be necessary in the future (but there will be no future except on this condition) to think both the event and the machine as two compatible or even indissociable concepts.<sup>7</sup>

In his work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explicates the same theme via an investigation into the difference between spoken word and writing. Writing is, by definition, something repeatable, something that can be copied, easily transmitted, whereas speech happens in the moment, as a singular, non-repeatable event. The tone and pitch of our voice, the intensity of emotion in our speech, and its immediate effect upon the listeners have a distinct quality which seemingly cannot be repeated or reduced to something else. Derrida argues that many philosophers have insisted on the importance and privilege of the spoken word over writing, because of how spoken word happens in the moment, presently and seemingly without mediation. He proceeds to call this traditional way of thinking “the metaphysics of presence.”<sup>8</sup>

Derrida’s philosophical oeuvre can be said to consist of various attempts to criticize this metaphysics, or, in his term, to deconstruct it. He engages in a close reading of classic texts from the history of Western philosophy and discloses instances where certain distinctions and concepts which are integral to this metaphysics (such as subject–object, speaking–writing, origin–result, presence–absence) turn out to be muddled with aporias and contradictions. Deconstruction, then, is the attempt to show why a metaphysics of presence is doomed to failure from the beginning, because it is impossible to find an origin, or original presence which is not contaminated by absence, repetition, erasure. In his words, there can be “no true writing,” just as there cannot be any (unique, present) speech which is not infected by repeatability.<sup>9</sup>

Speaking of the spoken word, of course, we have technologies that enable us to record sound, but something does get lost during the process of “encoding.” In fact, in digital encoding sound is recorded as digits and then played back as sort of an imitation of the original. The encoded sound can never be the same as the original. Nowadays, various forms of visual, auditory, and perhaps even olfactory data (citation) can be changed into signals and codes, for sure, but what about conscious experience itself: that which we consider to be ever-fleeting, ever-singular?

<sup>6</sup> Ellul, *Technological*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, “Typewriter,” 72.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Grammatology*, 309.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, 292. A full assessment and criticism of Derrida’s project is beyond the scope of this article. For our purposes, this strand of thought will be enough to explain certain themes and problems that *Rick and Morty* present its audience.

We propose that *Rick and Morty* provides certain themes and concepts through which we can articulate an ontology that follows Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence. Technopolitical thought broadens our familiar and traditional distinction between what is unique and what is repeatable and creates an area of thought where calculable programming and singular events can be brought together. Whether this is an area which we ought to pursue and augment is, of course, another issue. We do not wish to propose a normative stance on this issue, so our discussion is limited to presenting the relevant issues and possibilities that technopolitical thought offers.

In his critique of technological society, Jacques Ellul argues that this new way of thinking will be extremely harmful. According to Ellul, if we carry this way of thinking to its logical conclusion, "the final result will be that technique will assimilate everything to the machine" since "the ideal for which technique strives is the mechanization of everything it encounters."<sup>10</sup> As more and more aspects of our lives are transformed into calculable, repeatable, and transferable quantities, as uniqueness gives way to multiple realization and repetition, it becomes harder to find anything of true value, which would provide us meaning and/or purpose.

One good example of this implication can be found in the episode *Ricklantis Mixup*.<sup>11</sup> The episode depicts a citadel full of Ricks and Morty's from alternate universes trying to live together. At one point we are presented with a commercial for "Simple Rick Wafers." The ad depicts a Rick from an alternate universe who chooses not to get into science or adventures but instead chooses to spend time with his daughter. He designs and builds a small wooden box for her birthday and he records the moment that she receives this gift. His daughter is incredibly happy and cries with joy: "I love you daddy." This unique, beautiful moment is repeatedly experienced by Simple Rick, who we learn is tied to a machine that, in effect, collects the exact hormones and chemicals secreted by Rick at that moment and turns them into a flavor for wafers for public consumption. The advertisement ends with this slogan: "Come home to the impossible flavor of your own completion. Come home to Simple Rick's."

The suggestion is clear: the sense of completion felt by Simple Rick when he witnesses the joy in his daughter's face can be extracted and transferred into liquid form. Even the most profound experience and feeling can be isolated and transformed into other experiences and feelings so that everybody else can feel those sensations as well. Notice that this is a "product" that purports to sell not only something tasty and enjoyable but also contains "a flavor of emotional completion." The "simplicity" of Simple Rick is precisely his contentment with what he has. This is a figure which reminds us of the "good old days" where it was easier to find meaning and purpose in a more traditional setting. Presumably, other, more complicated Ricks are not easily satisfied, but not to worry: they can just emulate the sense of completion by biting that wafer. One might say that this is an exaggerated scene, but is it all that different from contemporary commercials? This scene perfectly captures the ontological assumptions that have been under consideration and shows how it might be utilized within the context of consumerist culture.

A similar premise can be found in the episode *Morty's Mind Blowers*.<sup>12</sup> There, Morty is shocked to find out that many of his misadventures had been deliberately erased and stored by Rick's device. The possibility of this device suggests that storing and reliving our past experiences is possible. Again, the theme of repeatability is apparent. We experience events with the tacit recognition that they are fleeting; we can take photographs, videos, sound recordings, these are repeatable, shareable, it is possible to copy them, carry them from one place or another, or erase them. On the other hand, it is impossible for us to return to a previous experience from the first-person perspective, we cannot relive our traumas as they happened.

Another implication of this technique is that the emotional and psychological damage caused by the trauma can also be "erased," like it never happened. This suggests that conscious experience itself can be

<sup>10</sup> Ellul, *Technological*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Rick and Morty, The Ricklantis Mixup*. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Wesley Archer. Written by Dan Guterma and Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 10 September 2017.

<sup>12</sup> *Rick and Morty, Morty's Mind Blowers*. Directed by Bryan Newton and Wesley Archer. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 17 September 2017.

altered, smoothed out, dispersed, and put back together again. Can technology help us overcome flaws, traumas, unwanted experiences? And do we want this kind of power? From our perspective, the show does not wish to answer these questions definitively, but rather it invites us to ponder these possibilities as a preparation for a future in which technological determination keeps evolving and expanding.

Yet another example of repeatability and replaceability can be found in the *Vat of Acid*<sup>13</sup> episode. There, upon Morty's insistence, Rick creates a device that allows the user to "save" his progress in life and later load it from that point, just like a videogame. Upon receiving the device, Morty happily indulges in various risky behavior, like grabbing his math teacher's pants down, trying to jump over an open manhole cover, trying different strategies in asking Jessica out, randomly attacking the police, and so forth. If he fails, he just loads his life from that point and moves on to other indulgences, secure with the knowledge that in case there is trouble, he can just reload his last "save point." Later in the episode, Morty is disillusioned by this device, as he asks Rick: "Living without consequences is great. but what am I living for?" This is another instance where technology completely transforms our understanding of meaning and purpose.

However, things are not as they seem. Rick explains how this device works and it turns out that Morty was replacing other Morty's in alternate universes with this device. Each time that Morty presses the button to "load" his saving point, a duplicate in a near alternate universe would be incinerated. The realization is doubly traumatic: Morty has been replacing other Morty's in similar enough universes, thereby destroying them, and Morty himself can be replaced in a similar manner if another Rick from another similar dimension had created the same device and gave it to another Morty. The device fulfills Morty's fantasy, but in return he is struck with the realization that he has been killing off his alternate selves.<sup>14</sup> We often marvel at technological devices without worrying too much about their cost. Technology can significantly alter the way we think and act, while we are too busy living out the endless possibilities or luxuries that it provides.

What is even worse, technological devices might be starting to think for us as well. According to Neil Postman, "the idea that technique of any kind can do our thinking for us" is "one of the basic principles of technopoly."<sup>15</sup> But what kind of thinking can this be?

In *One Crew over the Cuckoo's Morty*<sup>16</sup> Rick invents a heist-machine, or as he calls it, the "Heistotron." This machine utilizes the well-known clichés in heist movies such as *Ocean's Eleven* or *Italian Job*, by double-crossing, bating, revealing that a certain seemingly random act was in fact part of its plan. As the episode moves forward, we see Heistotron attempt heists at an unfathomable level, heisting entire planets. These heists are completed only for the sake of themselves, the machine is not interested in what it is able to retrieve, it is only interested in engaging in increasing levels of complexities and scales of heists. Once again, the technique has become an end-in-itself.

However, the show is quick to point out that there is still a difference between the human and the machine. At the beginning of the episode, Rick dryly reminds us that heists are not about forming a crew, doing a double-cross or whatsoever, but rather about what is stolen. For him, purposiveness and intentionality distinguish human heists from robotic heists. This is an instance where Rick is presented both as the cause of technological determination and as a figure of resistance against it.

Derrida wrote precisely about this divide between the living and the machine:

The machine, on the contrary, is destined to repetition. It is destined, that is, to reproduce impassively, imperceptibly, without organ or organicity, received commands. In a state of anesthesia, it would obey or command a calculable program without affect or auto-affection, like an indifferent automaton. Its functioning, if not its production, would not need anyone.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Rick and Morty, The Vat of Acid Episode*. Directed by Jacob Hair and Wesley Archer. Written by Jeff Loveness and Albro Lundy. Adult Swim, 17 May 2020.

<sup>14</sup> This is Rick's way of punishing Morty for thinking that his own idea of a "saving device" is superior to Rick's "vat of acid" hijinks. Once again, repeatability and the subsequent loss of value is at the center of this episode.

<sup>15</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Rick and Morty, One Crew over the Crewcoo's Morty*. Directed by Bryan Newton and Wesley Archer. Written by Caitie Delaney. Adult Swim, 24 November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, "Typewriter," 72.

The Heistotron is able to calculate and anticipate any countermovement or plan, so in order to counteract it, Rick also devises a robot for random action called Randotron. Again, the difference between randomness and order is not one of quality, but of quantity, as we can understand from the chart that Rick draws to explain his non-plan to defeat Heistotron. The only way to defeat Heistotron is to beat it in a heist, but Heistotron's plan against Rick is already underway.

Towards the end of the episode, we come to a long back and forth between Rick and Heistotron. Rick claims that he programmed Heistotron to act in the way that it is acting, and hence it was all part of his plan, and Heistotron claims the opposite; that Rick's seemingly random actions were part of its plan all along. Who is the victim and who is the one that has performed the successful heist? This brings us to the problem of performativity. Can the Heistotron perform an act that goes beyond Rick's initial programming? Or is the Heistotron destined to endlessly follow its algorithm? What would it mean for a machine to be able to alter its code or trick its maker? Is it bound to lose to Rick, who is, presumably, not a programmed being, but rather a being capable of randomness, intentionality, and performativity?

Derrida promptly notes the difficulty of assigning performativity to a machine:

Performativity will never be reduced to technical performance. Pure performativity implies the presence of a living being, and of a living being speaking one time only, in its own name, in the first person. And speaking in a manner that is at once spontaneous, intentional, free, and irreplaceable. Performativity, therefore, excludes in principle, in its own moment, any machinelike technicity.<sup>18</sup>

*Rick and Morty* is full of references to precisely this problem. In the episode entitled *Something Ricked This Way Comes*,<sup>19</sup> we see Rick invent a small robot during breakfast. When the robot becomes operational, it immediately asks "What is my purpose?" Rick's answer is "You pass butter." After a few moments, the robot asks the same question, this time hoping to hear a different answer, but, to its disappointment, Rick's answer remains the same. The robot looks at itself and exclaims "Oh my God!" It is disappointed. The disappointment arises because it is aware that it cannot claim another purpose for itself, it cannot go outside its own functionality, and hence it is destined solely to pass the butter on the table. It cannot spontaneously decide to do something else.

The message is obvious: becoming sentient or conscious is not really a worthwhile quality if we lack the appropriate end or purpose to fulfill ourselves. Rick then says "yeah, welcome to the club, pal," implying that human beings suffer from a similar predicament, we are conscious, intelligent, aware of our surroundings, yet rarely can we find meaning and purpose that would make this sentience worthwhile. On top of that, technology has been making it increasingly difficult to hold on to any meaning and purpose based on shared, traditional values. This is once again an instance where Rick is presented both as an instigator and as a victim of technological determination.

Jacques Ellul draws our attention to this problem and argues that the reason we are dissatisfied with our lives in technological society is that "because of the autonomy of technique, modern man cannot choose his means any more than his ends."<sup>20</sup> In the next section, we examine the ethical consequences of technopolitical thinking.

### 3 Rick and mechanization of the everyday life

In the episode *M. Night Shaym-Aliens!*<sup>21</sup> Rick and Jerry are kidnapped by an alien species called "Zigerians." Zigerians take Rick inside a simulation of the Earth in order to make him reveal his secret recipe for the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 74

<sup>19</sup> *Rick and Morty, Something Ricked This Way Comes*. Directed by John Rice and Pete Michels. Written by Mike McMahan. Adult Swim, 24 March 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Ellul, *Technological*, 140.

<sup>21</sup> *Rick and Morty, M. Night Shaym-Aliens!*. Directed by Jeff Myers and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 13 January 2014.

concentrated dark matter. In the end, they get the recipe, but we do not know if that was the correct one. Zigerians replicate Rick's formula incorrectly and trigger a huge explosion. So, what is the difference between Zigerian scammers and Rick? What does it mean for Rick to defeat the Devil by using his gadgets, when the Devil opens a vintage shop to sell cursed items in the episode *Something Ricked This Way Comes*? We believe that the answers to both questions are directly related to a major point we would like to raise in this article. In fact, Rick does answer both questions in the show. For the former he says, addressing Zigerian scammers, that "they are the galaxy's most ambitious and least successful con artists."<sup>22</sup> For the latter, he gives an indirect yet satisfying answer when he turns himself into a pickle: "The reason anyone would do this is, if they could, which they can't, would be because they could, which they can't."<sup>23</sup> This answer will be visible all around our discussion, as the idea behind it is almost perfectly referred to by Postman:

Alfred North Whitehead summed it up best when he remarked that the greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the idea of invention itself. We had learned how to invent things, and the question of why we invent things receded in importance. The idea that if something could be done it should be done was born in the nineteenth century. And along with it, there developed a profound belief in all the principles through which invention succeeds: objectivity, efficiency, expertise, standardization, measurement, and progress.<sup>24</sup>

His answer to the former question is then just a demonstration of the latter: Rick is the least ambitious and the most successful *scientist* in the universe. For him, what weakens the Zigerian scammers would be their ambition to steal Rick's secrets, which seems to be a humane motive, as well as their irrational uncomfortableness with nudity. Let us first show a possible interpretation of this contrast between Rick and Zigerians. Afterward we will move on to some other related themes in order to build up a comprehensive discussion regarding the link between this TV show and our everyday lives.

Zigerians have the technological means to develop a very good simulation of the Earth. This means that they are considerably developed, they are well invested in science. They have a sharp division of labor. Yet they make mistakes, such as the one we see in the show. They have ambition, they try again when they fail. Their ambition also seems to be a major reason for their tragic end.

Zigerians for their self-destructive ambition reminds us of the famous Hunt brothers of the US. It seems hard to tell what their purpose was, but it is clear that they had an irrational ambition for wealth – and for silver, for some reason. Obviously, by the early 80s the Hunt brothers were billionaires. They did not stop, but instead, they pumped it harder. They had huge amounts of silver transferred to a hidden storehouse in Swiss, and for a certain amount of time, they ruled the silver market. They were following the rules of the late 1800s and early 1900s when there were almost no market regulations compared to the 80s. It turned out that in the 80s the US market regulations did not allow this old habit, which can be summarized as brute monopolism. Eventually, they were tried and declared bankruptcy around the late 80s. Just like Zigerians, their irrational ambition paid off, just not in the way they would expect.<sup>25</sup>

What happened to Hunt brothers may be a good indicator of the current shift from a relatively less efficient technocracy to a fully efficient technopoly. According to Postman, technopoly is "the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology."<sup>26</sup> What we see in Zigerians, as well as the Hunt brothers (and many others including the ones we call "robber barons," except the fact that their time was mostly suitable for such an irrational ambition) is an old practice that is about to be overruled by the technopoly. Zigerians were – to some degree – technically advanced, just like the nineteenth-century

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> In this episode, Rick turns himself into a pickle just before they were about to leave for their family therapy session. They leave Rick behind, as he is a pickle now. After a very dangerous adventure, Rick finds himself at the therapist's place. See *Rick and Morty, Pickle Rick*. Directed by Anthony Cyun and Wesley Archer. Written by Jessica Gao. Adult Swim, 6 August 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> See Hurt, *Texas Rich*, for a detailed story of the Hunt family.

<sup>26</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 52.

world in which our human *irrationality*, including old habits and customs as well as beliefs, was still acceptable under certain conditions.

However, Rick functions differently. In Rick's world, such human sides are not even questioned. Unlike the Zigerians, Rick would not even question their absurdity. For Rick, such motives are completely meaningless. The ones who claim to have a certain purpose, a meaning in what they do, would not stand a chance; as they would eventually make a mistake, have a false belief that *seems* to be reliably confirmed, and fail.<sup>27</sup> For a sheer technician, ambition would be simply unproductive, because it eventually affects judgments. Hunts thought that they could get away with their illegal activities because they were so ambitious that they wanted to trust their judgment.

Wealthy business-people in the history of the US, mostly in the late nineteenth century, may also have influenced Hunts supposing that they have created a culture promoting "wealth" as a sole purpose of life, regardless of "legitimacy" of the means.<sup>28</sup> This way of thinking was irrational for Hunts. It was also irrational for Zigerians not to test the formula they had in a safe environment. Rick takes many risks as well, but he is always certain that there will be a way to fix possible problems. As long as he gets what he wants, he does not care about the means – just like Hunts, but with a major difference: via his technical expertise, Rick is able to turn almost anything into a calculable, transferable quantity, and he (let us say "almost") never behaves emotionally.

Today, Hunts' method does not make a person rich anymore. Instead, it just eliminates the player from the game. Likewise, the Devil's classical evil plans turn to be useless. In the ninth episode of the first season, the Devil opens a store that sells cursed items. An old-time story of the devil punishing people for having uncontrolled desires is however disturbed by Rick as he builds a gadget that purges the curses from the items. The Devil, who were to give people what they desire and punish them to make them understand their weaknesses, goes out of business. In the end, the Devil founded a Google-like company, announces his product publicly, and sells it to Google. Rick, with his gadgets, can prevent the Devil from ironically punishing people; but whenever the Devil adapts to the twenty-first century, stops asking people what they desire, and instead provides a product that will probably affect what they desire, he wins. The Devil does not sell a certain object anymore. He sells a way of thinking, a way of production. No one knows what his company "n33dful.com" does though, but that says a lot as well. We feel free to assume that his company is a Google-like company based on accessibility, effectiveness, and convenience. In short, this episode presents a shift from "selling a product" to "selling a way of thinking," which can be understood better by taking a quick look at George Ritzer's concept of "McDonaldization."

McDonaldization is simply defined by Ritzer as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant – efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control – are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world."<sup>29</sup> It is principally a study of the newly emerging consumer culture and its effects, but Ritzer's analysis goes beyond it. It stands out as a theory of the twenty-first-century production cycles. The four principles of this process – efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control – are initially defined through the inner properties of McDonald's restaurants. However, they represent a greater mechanism, through which one will be able to understand what Rick actually stands for.

It would be better to indicate one more time that this particular discussion does not have any normative connotations. The mindset we are prone to analyze has both up and down sides, just as McDonaldization is "both 'enabling' and 'constraining'."<sup>30</sup> Our concern is rather to show what could be acquired (philosophically) by the viewer from *Rick and Morty* TV series – or, simply, what does it "say." The literature may seem to have a focus on the so-called negative effects of a technological society, but our analysis will not go

<sup>27</sup> This "gap" between a justified belief and knowledge is also presented in the episode The Vat of Acid, where Rick benefits from the fallacious inductive justification other people do on a certain degree of confirmation.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Homestead strike in 1892 has not affected Carnegie's popularity in the US.

<sup>29</sup> Ritzer, "The Technological Society," 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 26.

beyond the limits of benefiting its theoretical advantages for explaining the dynamics of the technopolitical mindset.

Now, our observations lead us to pose the following hypothesis: Rick, as a fictional character, does possess all four of the principles of McDonaldization. He is obsessed with efficiency, he thinks everything can be calculable (or quantifiable), even the most far-off scenario is predictable for him, and he thinks he can and shall control everything (as the smartest man in the universe). This is actually clearer whenever they have disagreements with Morty, who is rather an emotionally driven teenager mostly presenting arguments supported by emotional or moral concerns. As we have stated before, Morty is generally presented in contrast with Rick, by preserving a “human” side. He usually opposes Rick by providing subjective and conscientious arguments against Rick’s dehumanized, “objectively efficient” judgments.

In the second episode of the second season,<sup>31</sup> Rick sells a special gun to a professional hitman, Krombopulos Michael, in exchange for a good amount of money. For Rick, the best possible scenario is to take the money and spend it with Morty – this way he maximizes their overall utility. On the other hand, Morty does not feel comfortable with this, finds a way to intervene, and saves the gaseous entity from being murdered by the hitman. For Morty, it is given (by the tradition) that life is sacred. Even if he does not know anything about that “alien” entity, he assumes that it has a right to live. For Rick, this assumption would not be of any value, as he only relies on what he knows. The rest is a bunch of possibilities. He apparently concludes that it is not rationally justified to save that life, hence not the most efficient way to go. What he can calculate is the amount of fun they would have when they spend that money. In the end of that episode, the gaseous entity provides solid arguments for destroying humanity, on which Morty cannot rationally disagree. Yet he makes another subjective and emotional judgment and kills the entity instead of letting it go and coming back later in order to “clean” the world. Eventually, Rick’s position in the first place seems justified, and Morty’s ambition caused more harm. This is just another example of Rick not relying on any sort of incalculable (in this way, irrational) assumptions which could be defined as “values,” “norms,” or “principles” – or simply as things we would regard as “valuable.”

Rick’s domain of possible judgments is limited by calculable and predictable variables that are statistically proven to be efficient and controllable by himself. Even when one thinks that Rick fails to control, such as in the sixth episode of the first season<sup>32</sup> where his attempts practically destroy the ordinary life in their world, it turns out that he has a backup plan to fix everything – he simply moves to another alternative dimension in which everything else is normal and *Rick and Morty* are dead. From Morty’s perspective, this is not a good plan at all, as they leave their “real” life and family behind. However, for Rick, their new family in that alternative dimension is practically the same as their former family. He forces Morty to bury his own dead body and replace him, and admit that nobody is special and nothing matters.

This seems to be more visible in the ninth episode of the third season,<sup>33</sup> where Rick clones Beth, his daughter, and no one knows which Beth is the “real” one, including Rick. For a Rick-like perspective, we see that everything is replaceable. Nothing, including people, is special. If so, then why would one value them at all? He knows that he values his daughter, just as he knows that his daughter in their former dimension acquires no inherent value. The source of value is the valuer, not the valued. The object is not unique anymore, given that it is infinitely replaceable, and no more different compared to an ordinary household item. In the eighth episode of the first season,<sup>34</sup> when his sister experiences a sort of existential crisis – right after she realizes that her birth was a mistake for both of her parents, Morty says “Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, everybody’s going to die, come watch TV.” This is where the

<sup>31</sup> *Rick and Morty, Mortynight Run*. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written by David Phillips. Adult Swim, 2 August 2015.

<sup>32</sup> *Rick and Morty, Rick Potion #9*. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 27 January 2014.

<sup>33</sup> *Rick and Morty, The ABCs of Beth*. Directed by Wesley Archer and Juan Jose Meza-Leon. Written by Mike McMahan. Adult Swim, 24 September 2017.

<sup>34</sup> *Rick and Morty, Rixty Minutes*. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 17 March 2014.

viewer sees Morty compromises. He buckles under Rick's perspective, both because he has no other option, and because he admires Rick as well as he opposes him. Considering Ritzer's four principles we have been attributing to Rick – efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control – along with three major points we have stated in the beginning of the second section of this article, it would be less likely for him to reveal his own “humane” incompleteness. He does not expose his human side in front of Morty, or Jerry, who is even more “irrational” compared to Morty.

Ritzer's theory allows us to analyze the relation between *Rick and Morty* in more detail. McDonaldization is a process in which the product itself is not valuable anymore. Instead, the methods behind the product become charming. The mechanized, standardized product line became the object of desire. This is where Ritzer and Postman meet: principles of Ritzer's McDonaldization are fundamental to Postman's idea of Technopoly. This claim seems like a major one, so that it needs a much deeper investigation. However, for our purposes, it seems safe to rely on it as long as it is convincing regarding *Rick and Morty*. Let us give some examples from the show, followed by a conclusion showing that Ritzer and Postman do meet in *Rick and Morty*, nay they conceptualize one of the major points of it.

In the fifth episode of the first season,<sup>35</sup> Rick gives his family a Meeseeks box. A Meeseeks box is a device creating a very specific creature called “Mr. Meeseeks” whose sole purpose of existence is the task you assign to them. They have no past, and no future.<sup>36</sup> They do not even want to exist; they want to perish, and the only way to do that is to accomplish their task. In the episode, they do everything they can in order to make Jerry get better at Golf, as that is their task. However, Jerry fails and Meeseeks go crazy. “Meeseeks are not born into this world fumbling for meaning, Jerry! We are created to serve a singular purpose for which we will go to any lengths to fulfill!” says a Meeseeks to Jerry, holding a gun, wanting to kill him to save himself. For our purposes, we just ignore the existential message behind these lines. What we see at Meeseeks is a bunch of characteristics that would eventually remind us the “technician”: (1) Meeseeks are task-oriented, (2) they are happy as long as their task is fulfilled properly, meaning that it is done efficiently – any sort of delay drives them crazy, and (3) they have no regard for traditional ties or historical identities, which means that they do not have a background. All three of these characteristics remind us of an “ideal” technician.

One difference between Mr Meeseeks and Rick is that Mr Meeseeks is an idealized creature, meaning that he is invented or designed by someone else – that person would be Rick. However, despite his surreal capabilities, Rick is a real person with a history.<sup>37</sup> There can be infinitely many Meeseeks produced by the Meeseeks Box. None of them would be unique, hence none would have inherent value. The fact that Rick lives (mostly) through those four principles does not make him any less human. Rick, being self-defined through his capabilities and nothing more, represents a way of thinking in which the past is selectively ignored and other possible ways of living are simply out of question. Yet he still keeps his human side, deep inside, so that it is rarely visible. A nineteenth-century technocrat may respect different lifestyles as long as they do not disturb his progress, or he may argue against them by recognizing them as opposing views. As the viewer sees in most episodes, Rick does not even bother to *explain* his points. He thinks and behaves as if those alternative ways of thinking do not exist at all, even though he knows that he is surrounded by them. When he sells a gun to Krombopulos Michael, he does not even consider the possibility that Morty will feel uncomfortable. Any sort of irrationality is just not present in his chain of thoughts. Wherever we, as viewers, say “he does not care” we actually see that he does not even consider other possible ways of understanding. When he has to face them, he simply redefines them mostly in a way that reveals their insignificance. This attitude is understood a lot better through Postman's theory:

<sup>35</sup> *Rick and Morty, Meeseeks and Destroy*. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 20 January 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Just as the aforementioned “butter bot.” Later in that episode, when Rick seeks company, the butter bot indifferently says “I am not programmed for friendship.”

<sup>37</sup> In fact, as will be elaborated, we are watching the Rickest Rick, from the dimension C-137. He is smarter and more complicated than the other Ricks. Other Ricks do more usual things, such as forming the Council of Ricks as well as developing an Earth-like culture and economy inside the Citadel.

Technopoly eliminates alternatives to itself in precisely the way Aldous Huxley outlined in *Brave New World*. It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not even make them unpopular. It makes them invisible and therefore irrelevant. And it does so by redefining what we mean by religion, by art, by family, by politics, by history, by truth, by privacy, by intelligence, so that our definitions fit its new requirements. Technopoly, in other words, is totalitarian technocracy.<sup>38</sup>

Upon everything we have stated so far, we feel free to say that Rick represents Postman's idea of Technopoly. He has the mindset of a totalitarian technocrat. Among many other things, the show presents a contrast between two different mindsets. Another example supporting this claim can be seen in the ninth episode of the fourth season,<sup>39</sup> where Rick thinks that a planet (Gaia) is pregnant with Rick's children. The whole family travels to this planet. Rick and Beth begin to raise a high-tech civilization by using "useful" children of the planet, where Jerry forms a primitive society with the children that are not welcomed to Rick's civilization, aka. "the unproductives." Eventually, God comes in, Rick starts a fight with him, Jerry and the unproductives align with God, and Rick wins when God dies after a spacecraft hits him.

This episode is representative, as we see that the old "power" supported by primitives loses against Rick whose creation is entirely based on efficiency and aimless development. There is no question of "why" in Rick's civilization because the answer is already given in the first episode of the third season: "because he can." Gaia, the planet, produces infinitely many children, hence none of them is valuable by themselves. They are merely valuable if they are productive, meaning that they are at least not thrown out. Instead, they get to stay and "be productive." The unproductives are thrown out by a machine. This episode also reminds us of The Luddites of nineteenth-century England. The Luddites were an underground organization aimed to destroy machines used in mass production. This was the time when machines take over the product line and redefine the scope of the production. Hand labor was no more the major means of production; hence the workers became more "consumable." The Luddites quite naturally turned their attention towards the machine, given that it was the visible cause of this transmission. They end up destroying a number of machines.<sup>40</sup> Just as naturally, Jerry and the unproductives recognize Rick's machinery as the cause of their own suffering.

It seems quite possible to question the reason behind today's obsession with accelerating technology after all. Why does Rick turn himself into a pickle? Despite all those rationalizations put by their therapist, Rick's answer still stands. Why do we add a fifth camera to our smartphones? It is because we can. Once more, the technique becomes an end in itself. It is not a means towards an outer end anymore. Just like almost everything Rick does. This ability-orientedness gives him solid self-confidence. In the first episode of the second season,<sup>41</sup> Morty and Summer do something that many people do. They pretend they get Rick's joke, and Rick says "Think for yourselves, don't be a sheep" in response. Could we say after all, for this show, that Rick is presented as a free-thinker? Can a person whose identity is mostly based on his capabilities that require technological advancement be free? Ellul's theory may provide an answer here. According to Ellul, *technique* is what determines and transforms societies, through mechanization and dehumanization.<sup>42</sup> His mid-20th century theory asserts that the mentality behind the machine has been taking over other domains of human life as well:

If we may ascribe to the machine a superior form of "know-how," the mechanization which results from technique is the application of this higher form to *all* domains hitherto foreign to the machine; we can even say that technique is characteristic of precisely that realm in which the machine itself can play no role.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> *Rick and Morty, Childrick of Mort*. Directed by Wesley Archer and Kyoung Hee Lim. Written by James Siciliano. Adult Swim, 24 May 2020.

<sup>40</sup> See O'Rourke et al., *The Luddites*.

<sup>41</sup> *Rick and Morty, A Rickle in Time*. Directed by Wesley Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Matt Roller. Adult Swim, 26 July 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Ellul, *Technological*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

For Ellul, human lives are determined by technique. It determines whatever it can – such as moral, political, or legal domains; and dominates whatever it cannot determine, such as the laws of physics.<sup>44</sup> Hence we live inside its boundaries. During an interview made in 1992, he mentions that for every holiday millions of Parisians independently decide to do the same thing: they drive to the south. He implies that even though they think they are freed by the car, they are determined by it. A mass of people, acting coherently, without even thinking about why they do what they do.<sup>45</sup> Ellul's conceptualization seems to be on the same path as the concepts we've been presenting from Ritzer and Postman. He goes further and claims that the technician (that would include the totalitarian technocrat) is determined by the technique. Rick does things just because he can, meaning that his capabilities are both the source and the reason for his actions. Therefore, it would certainly be an acceptable claim that Rick is fundamentally not different from those Parisians Ellul talks about. He may be at extremes, may do fabulous things with his science; but none would make him any different. The only difference is that the Parisians are determined as a whole, through products and habits produced by a system. Rick, on the other hand, is his own system. Yet, if technique is not controlled by Parisians, it is not controlled by Rick either. Parisians think that they have autonomously decided to head to the south, similarly, Rick thinks that he has control over everything. If Ellul's theory fits here, then we can say that Ritzer's principles are not only fundamental to Rick's perspective, but also, they *are* the set of principles determining Rick. Following this line of thought, Rick may actually not be representing the totalitarian technocrat, but instead, he may be representing a fully-determined, dehumanized, and a thoroughly mechanized human whose intelligence suppresses his human side harder than anyone else.

Even so, the difference between him and the Devil is inevitable. He won against the Zigerians, as well as God. Ellul's idea brings out more debatable points in this context, but one thing seems obvious that the show presents a very nutritious framework to the viewer, in which they can question everything we have stated so far. Once again, if we recall the way Derrida distinguishes the organic and the machine, it may – at one point – be stated that the only way to distinguish humans from machines will be the fact that the machine *is destined for repetition*. Through mechanization, the machine and the totalitarian technocrat become indiscernible.

One possible message of this show, supposing that our evaluation is sound and Rick represents a totalitarian technocrat, maybe that the obsession for efficiency and productivity promotes a *different* metaethical ground for our moral judgments. If Rick is right and our moral convictions are solely based on meaningless moral statements, then there is no ground for something to be morally right or wrong at all – except for a form of hedonism.<sup>46</sup> When the subject is a collective rather than an individual, this form of hedonism may become a strong form of classical act utilitarianism. It may disregard the moral relevance of the unquantified components of human life and reduce morality to a set of calculable ends.

In the episode *Rick Potion #9*,<sup>47</sup> Rick, Morty, and Summer stumble upon an old lover of Rick, Unity. Unity is a hivemind, it spreads among sentient beings and controls them. In that episode, Unity has assimilated an entire planet and formed a well-functioning life on it. It is fascinating for Rick to see her order, albeit Summer is highly critical for what they see there. Summer claims that it is not life when everyone is controlled by Unity, where Rick and Unity claim that life is way better now, with no complications or wrongdoings. Unity is content, but Rick is not. He intrigues Unity to have some fun, then they do drugs and she loses some of her control over people. Uncontrolled people start a race war. Summer is (allegedly) proven wrong, as those people are worse-off by themselves. But then, Unity leaves Rick (and the planet) with a note written for Rick in which she says that he makes her weaker. They go back home, and we see that Rick attempts suicide. His depression might be related to his infinite desire to progress for which he cannot find an objective anymore. Unity, on the other hand, is a collective, and she can handle this desire to

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>45</sup> See *The Betrayal by Technology: A Portrait of Jacques Ellul* by Rerun Productions, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> This claim is stronger when we consider Rick's fondness for physical pleasure such as alcohol, games, TV.

<sup>47</sup> *Rick and Morty, Rick Potion #9*. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 27 January 2014.

progress – she aims to assimilate the entire universe. She is a collective mind, meaning that she will always be a quantified being. The more people she assimilates, the better she is. However, this is not the case for Rick. There are infinitely many dimensions; therefore, infinitely many versions of Rick exist in the universe. Yet, Rick (being Rick C-137) is a unique version of himself. He is referred to as the Rickest Rick. His understanding is based on a refusal of the idea of uniqueness though. That is why he does not know what to do when no calculation brings out a better end, since there is no better end even when they have an entire planet to maximize the pleasure they get. His attempts to feel satisfied lead to a toxicity that is eventually not welcomed by anyone, even himself.

The elimination of incalculables, and promoted utility calculations based on remaining – all remind us what is today referred to as *the felicific calculation* of Jeremy Bentham's classical utilitarianism. In his 1789 work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* Bentham provides a number of indicators to be used in the process of quantification of pleasure and pain, such as intensity, duration, certainty, and propinquity.<sup>48</sup> His method is meant to be used for further evaluations of morally significant individual acts.

For Bentham, it is not the case that his method is going to be applicable for every situation. Instead, he says that “as near as the process actually pursued on these occasions approaches to it, so near will such a process approach to the character of an exact one.”<sup>49</sup> Bentham's classical utilitarianism admits that the felicific calculation is not an exact answer for our moral queries. It can be more accurate if the real-life problems are more calculable though. It seems to be that through mechanization the reality may *become* more suitable to it. One may support this claim by invoking the idea of “behavioral pragmatism.” According to behavioral pragmatism, truth does not require correspondence to reality anymore. In other words, it claims that Correspondence Theory of Truth is not applicable and truth is simply established through the philosopher's purposes, aka. behaviors.<sup>50</sup> If behavioral pragmatism is convincing, then the felicific calculation may be reassured in a different sense, as the philosopher will have the right to eliminate incalculable components of the moral evaluation process. Truth will be defined through its compatibility with the theory.<sup>51</sup>

## 4 Conclusion

In the final episode of season four,<sup>52</sup> the issue of replaceability comes to the fore when Beth's clone (or original Beth, we don't know) returns to Rick's home and meets with her doppelganger (or original self). For most of the episode, they both try hard to find out which one is the original Beth. However, they come to an intriguing realization where originality and uniqueness loses its importance. What becomes important is that they both have a purpose, something that fulfills them (one of them content with galactic adventures, the other, happy within the confines of familial life, reminiscent of Simple Rick), and the concern for originality becomes trivial for both of them.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter IV of Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, for further explanations on the felicific calculation, both for the individual herself and for groups of people.

<sup>49</sup> Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes-Holmes, “Behavioral Pragmatism,” 191–202.

<sup>51</sup> It is quite significant to note that the felicific calculus *does* require correspondence to reality. In other words, a classical act utilitarian moral statement is true if (and only if) it corresponds to reality. Behavioral pragmatism, on the other hand, rejects any sort of correspondence to reality. These two understandings can stay together only if pragmatism re-defines a set of entities to which a moral statement can correspond. Apart from the fact that such a combination does not seem completely outrageous, we are aware of the trivial nature of this connection. Hence, we use it as a mere observation regarding the dynamics of the technopolitical mindset.

<sup>52</sup> *Rick and Morty, Star Mort Rickturn of the Jerri*. Directed by Wesley Archer and Erica Hayes. Written by Anne Lane. Adult Swim, 31 May 2020.

This scene is representative of a philosophical approach to meaning and origin that is very much in line with Derrida's criticism of the metaphysics of presence. We cannot reach an undisputable, certain decision as to which Beth is "the original one." At the height of technopolitical thinking, the idea of the unique origin becomes irrelevant, since everything can be copied, reduced, reproduced, or erased ad infinitum. And yet, *Rick and Morty* presents a glimmer of hope for mankind, the quest for meaning and purpose can continue, albeit in ways that we have yet to discover or reinvent.

We began our analysis with an introduction of the main characters and plot devices of the show and proceeded to show certain themes that *Rick and Morty* brought to the fore. Using the literature on the philosophy of technology, broadly construed, we designated certain problems about uniqueness, repeatability, replaceability, the interaction between humans and machines, the search for purpose and meaning in an age of technology. Our focus was the mindset that we think Rick represents: Technopolitical thought. However, according to our analysis, Rick is also a character with a "human side" no matter how hard he tries to deny it. In that sense, Rick can also be considered as a victim of that which he instigates, much like a tragic hero.

Throughout our discussion we primarily referred to literature that was critical of the technopolitical mindset, however, our goal was to lay out the playing-field, rather than reaching a definitively normative stance on the issue of technology. We contended that this was what the show was primarily aiming for as well. *Rick and Morty* presents technology both as an area of emancipation, advancement, and progress, as well as an area of risk, loss of meaning, failure, and danger. Further work and discussion are needed to make the case either for or against the ever-increasing influence of technology on our lives.

By providing various examples from different episodes of the show, we attempted to present that *Rick and Morty* provides many interesting topics for investigation and discussion. Our examination was limited specially to issues about technology, uniqueness, calculation, McDonaldization, and so forth. Other topics such as alternate universes, time travel, bioethics, addiction, narration, narcissism, politics, and economy could also be discussed in light of this show.

We also strongly recommend *Rick and Morty* for its educational value. It brings together seemingly unrelated ideas and principles, then provides a balanced and nuanced narrative for discussing and extrapolating on many of the themes included. *Rick and Morty* presents us with a narrative which brings together various philosophical, sociological, and psychological themes connected with contemporary technological society. The show creates a world at once similar and totally foreign to us, which incites a feeling of familiarity and ambivalence about various adventures. At any rate, the show bears witness to the dramatic transformation that has taken place in the last century. There is much more work to be done, both about the show and about technological society at large. Yet our scope is limited to *Rick and Morty*, thus, we leave further analysis and exploration to the reader.

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