

Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*



الشفافية كعلم أخروي علماني في رواية ديف إيجرز الديستوبية الدائرة

الباحث: مدرس مساعد راندي صلاح يلدا
جامعة صلاح الدين – أربيل
مديرية تكنولوجيا المعلومات

البريد الإلكتروني Email : Randi.yalda@su.edu.krd

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديف إيجرز، الدائرة، علم الأخريات العلماني، الشفافية، اللاهوت السياسي.

كيفية اقتباس البحث

يلدا ، راندي صلاح ، الشفافية كعلم أخروي علماني في رواية ديف إيجرز الديستوبية الدائرة، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، آب 2026، المجلد: 16، العدد: 8.

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر (Creative Commons Attribution) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

مسجلة في
ROAD

مفهرسة في
IASJ





Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers's Dystopian Novel *The Circle*

Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers's Dystopian Novel *The Circle*

Randi Salah Yalda

Directorate of Information Technology, Salahaddin University- Erbil (SUE)

Keywords : Dave Eggers; *The Circle*; secular eschatology; transparency; political theology.

How To Cite This Article

Yalda, Randi Salah, Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers's Dystopian Novel *The Circle*, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, Auguts 2026, Volume:16, Issue8.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

ملخص

خضعت رواية "الدائرة" للكاتب ديف إيغرز (2013) لتحليلات أكاديمية واسعة النطاق، حيث تُعتبر في معظمها حكاية رمزية عن المراقبة الرقمية ونقدًا لأوهام دعاة ما بعد الإنسانية حول بلوغ الكمال البشري، فضلًا عن كونها تحذيرًا من سيطرة الشركات على عمليات الاستفتاء. إلا أن هذه القراءات تغفل المنطق البنيوي الأعمق للرواية. وبلاستناد إلى حجة كارل لوفيت بأن أيديولوجيات التقدم المعاصرة هي تعبيرات علمانية عن علم الأخريات المسيحي (لوفيت، 1949، تشوريل، 2021)، ومناقشة إريك فوغلين لمفهوم "تجلي الأخريات" (فوغلين، 1952)، وموارد من اللاهوت السياسي لكارل شميت (شميت، 2005) وشعرية النهاية لفرانك كيرمود (كيرمود، 1967). تُطور هذه المقالة أطروحة مفادها أن مبدأ الشفافية الكاملة في رواية "الدائرة" يُفهم على أفضل وجه باعتباره علمًا أخرويًا علمانيًا. من خلال قراءة متأنية، تُظهر المقالة أن إيغرز يُترجم بشكل منهجي قواعد تاريخ الخلاص المسيحي إلى إطار تكنولوجي: عالم هابط تسوده الأسرار و"الأكاذيب"، والاهتداء والاعتراف من خلال طقوس "التطهر"، وفداء المعاناة من

خلال كشفها، والقضاء على الموت من خلال تخليد البيانات، و"اكتمال" نهائي (مصطلح الشركة للحدث) يُعد أيضاً نهاية وشيكة لـ"نور أبدي" يُقدم "السلام" و"الوحدة" (إيغرز 2013، ص 490). وبالتالي، فإن رعب "الدائرة" لاهوتي أكثر منه سياسي، وفي سعيها لتحقيق النهاية في التاريخ، تُنشئ "الدائرة" تلك النهاية الشمولية التي يُشير إليها لويث وجاين سفينونغسون كخطر من مخاطر جعل النهاية وشيكة. إن إعادة صياغة الشفافية الكاملة كشكل من أشكال علم الأخريات العلماني يضع "الدائرة" في سياق التاريخ الفكري للعلمنة، وبالتالي يُقدم منظوراً جديداً بشأن اليوتوبيا الرقمية المعاصرة. إعادة صياغة الشفافية الكاملة كشكل من أشكال علم الأخريات العلماني يضع "الدائرة" في سياق التاريخ الفكري للعلمنة، وبالتالي يُقدم منظوراً جديداً بشأن اليوتوبيا الرقمية المعاصرة.

Abstract

The Circle by Dave Eggers (2013) has been the subject of scholarly analysis largely as a fable of digital surveillance and a critique of transhumanists' fantasies about achieving human perfection, as well as a warning against the corporate takeover of referendum processes, but these readings miss the novel's most profound structural logic. Drawing on Karl Löwith's argument that present-day ideologies of progress are secularized expressions of Christian eschatology (Löwith, 1949; Chorell, 2021), Eric Voegelin's discussion of the "immanentization of the eschaton" (Voegelin, 1952), and resources from Carl Schmitt's political theology (Schmitt, 2005) and Frank Kermode's poetics of ending (Kermode, 1967), the article develops the thesis that *The Circle*'s principle of total transparency is best understood as a secular eschatology. By means of close reading, the article demonstrates that Eggers systematically translates the grammar of Christian salvation history to a technological framework: a fallen world where there are secrets and "lies," conversion and confession through the ritual of "going clear," redemption of suffering through the exposure of suffering, the elimination of death through perpetuation of data, and an ultimate "Completion" (the company's term for the event) that is also an immanent eschaton of "eternal light" that offers "peace" and "unity" (Eggers 2013, p. 490). Thus, the horror of *The Circle* is therefore theological more than merely political, and in achieving the eschaton within history, *The Circle* creates the totalitarian finality that Löwith and Jayne Svenungsson cite as a hazard of immanentizing the end. Recontextualising total transparency as a form of secular eschatology situates *The Circle* in the intellectual history of secularization and thus provides a new perspective regarding contemporary digital dystopia.



1. Introduction

Eggers begins with the book, *The Circle*, in Eden. When Mae Holland, the main character, walks into the technology company that will eventually consume her, she thinks, “My God, it’s heaven” (Eggers, 2013, p. 1). The campus she surveys is a landscape of “soft green hills”, clay tennis courts and citrus trees, with red cobblestones that feature tiles bearing laser-cut imperatives — “Dream”, “Participate”, “Breathe” (Eggers, 2013, pp. 1–2). Additionally, the entire book is prefaced by an epigraph from John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*, which states there was “no limit, no boundary at all, to the future” (Eggers, 2013). From the first page of the text, therefore, Eggers frames *The Circle* as not simply a workplace, but as *Paradise Lost*; a place where, as an early passage states, “All had been made perfect” and outside *The Circle* “there was nothing but noise and struggle, failure and filth” (Eggers, 2013, p. 30; (cf. Herman, 2018, p. 166)) (which is consistent with the Old Testament creation story). Therefore, the attentive reader will notice that the text uses the language of technological progress and reaches for the salvation vocabulary rather than having a distinct metaphoric language of salvation. For the most part, criticism of the novel has largely understood the saved vocabulary as metaphor as opposed to structure. Critics use one of three broad analytical forms. First and foremost, the largest group analyses *The Circle* as a document that studies surveillance by tracing how Bentham and Foucault’s definitions of the panopticon have crossed over into the digital world; and how *The Circle*’s cameras are instruments of disciplinary and lateral control (e.g., Jarvis, 2019; Işık, 2020; Han, 2015; Mastroianni Greco, 2024). Second, the literature critiques the book as a critique of Transhumanism, and the promise of “realizing potential” reflects a fantasy of human enhancement and disembodiment (Laguarta Bueno, 2018). The third form uses the novel to outline a form of political theory focused upon the “demoxie” and the corporately subsumed democratic sovereignty in *The Circle* (Maurer and Rostbøll, 2020). Each of these forms is illuminating and contains something that is plain in the text of the novel. However, they also all bracket a feature that my argument will take as primary: *The Circle* does not simply gaze, enhance, or govern its followers; it provides them with a promise of salvation and structures the promise around its presumed end, Completion.

The Circle’s ideology of radical transparency is best analyzed as secular eschatology. Karl Löwith’s *Meaning in History* (1949) shows that the modern belief in progress is not an opposition to the Christian faith, but rather a disguised inheritor of it; according to Löwith, the modern philosophies of history are secularized versions of Christian eschatology,



in which the Kingdom of God has been transposed onto an immanent future (Chorell, 2021, p. 178; Löwith, 1949). Consequently, while secularization does not abolish the theological structure of hope, it retains the structure while removing all transcendental objects from the structure of hope. Thus, the concepts still carry the weight of being religious or theological in origin even though they present as rational concepts (Chorell, 2021, p. 179; (cf. Schmitt, 2005)). Eric Voegelin (1952) gave a name to this transposition of the eschaton, defining the modern political mass movement phenomenon as the “immanentization of the Christian eschaton”: that is, modern political mass movements attempt to interpret “the concrete society and the order within that society [as the eschaton] and achieve the perfection which Christianity has guaranteed to it at the conclusion of time” within the temporal span of history. *The Circle* is a powerful vehicle for manifesting a secularized eschatology. Its founders promise redemption, not efficient business practices; those adhering to *The Circle* are converts, not simply customers; and, from Mae’s perspective and vision, the goal of achieving a completed Circle is to experience only the memory of humanity’s imperfections at the end of history (Eggers, 2013, p. 490). As reading *The Circle* as secular eschatology adds one more analytical structure to the existing list, it will also transform the four previous analyses by creating a unified soteriological narrative: the surveillance apparatus is the means of judgment; human perfection is the glorification that will result; and the abolition of political divisions occurs when the eschaton is declared to be immanent. The title of the novel precisely describes this normative narrative; Eamon Bailey describes that a circle is “the most durable shape in the cosmos ... nothing is as perfect a shape as a ‘circle’” and when *The Circle* closes, its perfection is attained through its completeness (Eggers, 2013, p. 287). Thus, to “complete *The Circle*” is not simply a slogan of *The Circle* as a corporation, but is also the definition of an eschaton, where history is brought to its intended and final rest.

This argument will be developed over five stages. First, I will summarize the critical literature on *The Circle* and explain the methodology I will use to develop the argument in this article. Next, I will read and analyze the work in sequence through five different phases of a soteriological history: creation and perfection (i.e., paradise on earth); sin, repentance, and faith (i.e., acknowledgement); the name of the eschaton as Completion; the abolition of all pain and suffering; and the fate of those who have rejected the good news of Completion. The final section of this article will position the argument of this article in the context of the Löwith–Blumenberg debate concerning secularization, and provide some



implications for contemporary dystopian literature, before concluding. Ultimately, the premise of the argument presented in this article is that Eggers has produced a text that warns against humanity's most pervasive and dangerous temptation—attempting to establish heaven on earth—through his example of *The Circle*, by aligning his work with the intellectual tradition of humans living by secular faith.

2. Literature Review

The Circle, published in 2013, has since generated a large amount of academic criticism, most of it centered around four interrelated topics. The most popular of these is surveillance. Utilizing Jeremy Bentham's notion of a panopticon and Michel Foucault's ideas about discipline and visibility, many scholars argue that the See Change video surveillance cameras in *The Circle* are the ultimate form of panopticons, to the extent that individuals "see themselves" as subject to surveillance and subsequently control themselves accordingly. Brian Jarvis provides an analysis of the way entertainment is used to reinforce that self-control, and Derya Işık offers an explicit Foucauldian reading of the power held by *The Circle* as a surveillance tool. Byung-Chul Han's *The Transparency Society* is now considered a primary reference point for discussing exhibition, hyper-communication, and the "digital panopticon," where the surveilled person is both prisoner and guard. Most recently, Greta Mastroianni Greco has situated *The Circle* within a "digital turn" in dystopian literature, identifying parallels between the corporate surveillance described in the novel, and earlier examples of this type of storytelling. Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon's *Liquid Surveillance* provides a broader sociological context for these discussions.

The second major body of literature on *The Circle* addresses transhumanism. Carmen Laguarda Bueno maintains that the narrative element portrays a battle between utopian and dystopian views of technology, with the latter demonstrating the inherent inhumanity of humanity's technological transfiguration. In this discussion, she argues that the statement "realizing our potential," made by one of the characters in the novel, could be interpreted as an example of "eugenics" within the field of technology. Martin Paul Eve and Joe Street identify *The Circle* as part of a newly emerging genre, specifically the "Silicon Valley novel," and Frida Beckman contends that the stylistic "discipline" that these authors impose on the text parallels the control depicted in the narrative.

A third body of literature addresses political concerns in *The Circle*. Kathrin Maurer and Christian F. Rostbøll have provided the most



thorough political analysis of the book to date by examining the newly coined term, “demoxie” (the ability to vote through one’s Circle account), as a manifestation of “complete democracy.” They argue that, while the idea of complete democracy is attractive, the creation of a “de facto system” for the company administering public spaces is a fantasy of “instant” (or “real-time”) accountability, as opposed to the space and time necessary for reflective accountability. In their examination of these two forms of accountability, they provide analysis of the total collapse of the public vs. private distinction that Hannah Arendt identified as characteristic of totalitarianism in modernity; their reading is further supplemented by Michael Rectenwald’s assessment of corporate “governmentality” and the “Google Archipelago.

The fourth body of literature has connected *The Circle* to the historical tradition of utopianism and dystopias. Peter C. Herman has compared *The Circle* to More’s *Utopia* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, arguing that the tech company at the heart of the book is similar to Huxley’s Party in 1984 because both companies pursue power, but also that like all prior examples of dystopian literature, they offer solutions to real problems (such as misery) in the form of negatives. This literary tradition is supported by M. Keith Booker’s foundational work on the intrinsic value of dystopian literature as social criticism, and by the intertextuality that occurs throughout *The Circle* because of George Orwell’s media influence. Margaret Atwood’s literary review of *The Circle*, “When Privacy is Theft,” notes that the major theme in *The Circle* is related to the social construction and destruction of privacy and highlights the spiritual/emotional significance associated with privacy in this society.

Within this tradition, one descendant has been largely overlooked in *The Circle* criticism, namely, the transparency dystopia, as established by Yevgeny Zamyatin in his novel *We*, and continued by Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In Zamyatin’s novel, One State is represented as a glass city in which all of its citizens are always fully visible via their “Benefactor” (an all-powerful leader) and Eggers’ narrative exhibits similar sympathetic figures in the Wise Men and a glass campus. Additionally, long before the publication of either *The Circle* or Zamyatin’s *We*, many critics have identified that classic dystopian literature serves as a form of secularized religion; Big Brother in Orwell’s novel can be viewed as analogous to a God, who is worshiped through worship of Hate, Our Ford in Huxley’s novel is worshiped, etc. While many critics have noted the use of religious symbolism in *The Circle*, they have all considered it to be an extension of the totalitarian



style associated with Orwell rather than as an organizing principle for the world depicted in the novel.

In general, the criticisms of *The Circle* share the fact that none treat the transparency established in *The Circle* as a religious expression in secular disguise; for the purpose of this paper, however, the revisionist works of Löwith, Voegelin, Schmitt, Taylor, and Svenungsson provide sufficient evidence of immanent salvation narratives to conclude that *The Circle* represents an example of a secularized eschatology. The main thesis of this paper is that while critics have declared *The Circle* to be representative of a panopticon, an allegory for transhumanism, and a warning, none of them have considered *The Circle* to be a secularized eschatology, as its own language asserts. This article serves to fill this gap.

3. Theoretical Framework and Method

The study uses a close reading approach to analyze the text in relationship to its theoretical framework; this is the same approach used by literary critics. The language, structure and imagery of a text are subject to discipline through a defined interpretive framework (Booker, 1994).

The interpretive framework of this study will be the secularization thesis (Löwith, 1949) as restructured according to Chorell and Styfhals: i.e., modern stories of progress reproduce the formal, structural characteristics of the eschatology of the Christian faith (fall, redemptive act, conclusion of the world, end of time) while moving the narrative structure to a position within the history of earthly existence. This framework can provide insight into the form of *The Circle*: it does not simply examine whether religious imagery is present but attempts to prove that the entire character of the world proposed by *The Circle* is that of a salvation history. Eric Voegelin's analysis of political religious movements (Voegelin, 1952) complements the structure of the secularization thesis and serves as the central conceptual framework for this study.

Voegelin asserts that the primary orientation of "gnostic" mass movements is the "immanence of the Christian eschaton"—that is, gnostic movements interpret worldly existence and its system of order as the expression of an eschaton and view what was previously thought to be unattainable (the final perfection of the Christian faith) as achievable during worldly time and history. The present reading provides strong support for this definition and demonstrates it as being named "Completion" in Eggers's *The Circle*.

The framework will also be augmented in two areas. The first is through Schmitt's (2005) political theology, which identifies that modern political concepts are secularized concepts from a theological perspective. Thus, I

will use Schmitt's political theology to interpret *The Circle*'s claim to sovereignty. The second augmentation is using Kermode's (1967) poetics of the ending. I will apply Kermode's ideas as a basis for interpreting "Completion" within the context of Eggers's novel as a literary eschaton and demonstrate that it eventually becomes catastrophically literalized within the text of *The Circle*. In addition, the distinction made by Svenungsson (2016) between an open, prophetic future and a closed, immanently realised end will be the basis for interpreting how the danger posed by *The Circle* is achieved (Chorell, 2021).

There are two primary methodological objections I must consider. The first comes from the influential work of Hans Blumenberg (1983). Blumenberg's challenge to the secularization thesis states that by assigning the label of "secularized eschatology" to modern day progress, the substantialist conceptual framework of religion is in fact, present in secular concepts of life up to the point of historical precedence since the time of the earliest man's quest for knowledge (Blumenberg, 1983). Therefore, the present study does not make the strong claim of genetic origin from which Blumenberg claims to oppose or accomplish; rather, my purpose is to demonstrate that the structure of *The Circle* is consistent with the structure of a salvation history and that the form, imagery and rhetorical devices of the novel express an eschatological arrangement irrespective of any historical ties between them. Using Blumenberg's own terminology, *The Circle* is a classic example of the reoccupation of the questions which were answered through religion (salvation) being answered through technology now that the question has been vacated. Thus, the eschatological reading of *The Circle* does not contradict Blumenberg's caution and is not dependent on the substantialist conceptual framework he rejects.

The second reason for suspicion is that the idea of perfectibility, teleology, and the promise of a world without suffering can all be found in the general discourse of secular utopia. Therefore, by defining *The Circle* as an eschatological construct adds no value to a utopian reading of *The Circle*; therefore, the analytical distinction will be specific. The integral distinction between an eschatological and a utopian form of discourse is not in the promise of a new world but rather in the presence of a soteriological structure. A soteriological structure must contain (1) an understanding of sin (secrecy), (2) a way to redeem oneself from that sin (confession and transparency), (3) an understanding of the final nature of God's judgement (the constant gaze), and (4) a consummation which ends the history of the world (rather than improving upon it). *The Circle* reflects each of these structures. The theological analogue to *The Circle* is



postmillennialism, or the belief that in time, those who have faith will through their works create the kingdom of God on earth and subsequently usher in the end of the world; therefore, the language used to describe “we will complete *The Circle*” is entirely of a postmillennial form. Additionally, the millenarism energy which Norman Cohn traced (Cohn, 1970) in medieval era mass movements, combined with the “activist” form of “immanentization” separated by Voegelin, provides the historical roots of *The Circle* as a company that manufactures the completion of *The Circle* ahead of time.

Additionally, I will demonstrate that there are four primary indicators for identifying the characteristics of an eschatological form of discourse: (i) a linear teleological structure with a single ending point; (ii) a soteriology or understanding of the means of salvation; (iii) a promise to eliminate death and redeem suffering; and (iv) an immanently defined eschaton or the understanding that the eschaton is attainable. Each of these indicators will be substantiated with verbatim quotations from the Penguin (2013) edition of *The Circle* (which will be referenced parenthetically and by page). The in-text citations will use the Harvard author-date method of citation, and the bibliography will be numerically identified. Finally, the analytical framework will provide its verification not through measurements, but through the completeness and coherence of the framework in accounting for the text, including those voices that speak against the text, which I will use at the final movement in the analysis as supporting evidence to establish my argument.

4. Analysis

4.1 *Paradise and the Fallen World*

Eggers establishes the eschatological lens for *The Circle* even before starting his narrative. Mae's first experience of the campus is “it's heaven” (Eggers, 2013, p.1), which is not hyperbole but rather the lens through which the entire work is viewed. This is restated through the Eden-like landscaping of the grounds, the messages on the tiles (“breathe,” “dream”), and the Steinbeck epigraph suggesting. There is no limit to the future (Eggers, 2013, pp.1–2). While the societies “outside the walls of *The Circle*” represent “noise and struggle, failure and filth,” on the other hand, *The Circle* represents perfection (Eggers, 2013, p.30); the use of theological vocabulary, with “perfection” representing things inside and “corruption” outside, combined into the founding act of the company represent the redemptive act of the fallen. The “TruYou” account with which the company will replace the tenets of the fallen Babel (where “false identities, identity theft, multiple usernames,” Anonymous and “Trolls” previously existed), provide every user's



identity to be “one account, one identity, one password, one payment system, per person,” thus making “all posters accountable” and returning “trolls” to the “darkness” (Eggers, 2013, pp.20–22). The redemptive language in these passages is clear— “one true name” replaces “many false names” and “light drives out darkness.” “TruYou” represents a technological doctrine about finding one’s true self and offers the promise of being completely known through the idea of having “one identity” associated with a digital profile.

The teleological structure of the company is established with Bailey’s admission that it “bugs” him to see the company logo, an incomplete circle, as it “represents what’s left to do here,” and he recognizes that he (the company) has a mission—to close that circle (Eggers, 2013, p.287). The company represents a world of incompleteness and the need for redemption; therefore, the overall storyline of *The Circle* will represent the movement from that incompleteness to completeness. Löwith articulated that *The Circle* “contains from the outset an eschatological anticipation of future salvation and thus a vision of the present state of mankind as depraved” (Chorell, 2021, p.182, quoting Löwith). The present is fallen; the future will be perfect, with the company as the facilitator of closing the distance between the two states.

The Edenic lens Eggers establishes is rooted in history. Eggers’s rewriting of heaven can be understood within the parameters of the founding narrative of the “transparency dystopia,” Zamyatin’s *We*. In Zamyatin’s fictitious world of One State, they regained an Eden-like paradise. In Zamyatin’s narrative, the narrator discusses an ancient story of Paradise that defines the current civilization as his story: the ancients were offered the choice to have “happiness without freedom or freedom without happiness.” The ancients chose freedom, which caused them to fall from grace; thus, One State redeemed their fall by creating a second Eden-like Paradise, where the citizens have “innocence as Adam and Eve did” (Zamyatin, 2021, p.53). The correspondence between *The Circle* and *We* demonstrates that the totality of Zamyatin’s work (and Eggers’s) is that of a restored Eden.

4.2 Sin, Confession and Conversion

If secrecy is sin, *The Circle*’s doctrine is to define sin and state it as three commandments: “Secrets are lies,” “Sharing is caring,” and “Privacy is theft” — all of which are expressions Mae creates (Eggers 302-303). The moral teaching, Bailey instructs, is that “the secret is the reason for the immoral, antisocial, and destructive act you have committed,” which means to Bailey that it is not only inconvenient to have secrets but that it is also wrong to.



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*



Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 8



The solution is to confess. In the library, Bailey is like a Socratic examiner. He asks Mae if she has kept anything from him, and “Lying is not an option” comes immediately to Mae’s mind. After confessing her secret, he gently absolves her: “Only lies will cause us to get in trouble. Only things hidden” (Eggers 290). Bailey assumes the confessor already knows of Mae’s sin (“Of course, I knew you had been here”) and requires that Mae disclose it as an act of penance; it is not the information to be disclosed that redeems but rather the act of disclosing (Eggers 290). The next logical step after confession regarding *The Circle*’s doctrine is to obtain salvation. Bailey argues that universal observation would eliminate the possibility of sin: “If everyone was watching you, who would act unethically, immorally, or illegally?” (Eggers 289). By obtaining universal observation, the end goal would be a redeemed human race: “We would have no choice but to be at our best ... Finally, we would be able to do good. In a world where bad decisions are taken away, our only option will be to make good decisions” (Eggers 290). This is a true soteriology (a description of how to be freed from sin); the means of obtaining is a system of surveillance that is a guiding moral principle. For Bailey’s own concept of conscience is to use the “internalized eye of God” as a basis for governing his behaviour, so he will use the concept of his wife watching him from a closed-circuit video camera, which he then wants to apply to everyone (Eggers 289). Technology is expected to fulfill the promise of Christianity by providing a means for society to end the divided will and enter a condition where what is right will no longer be a struggle, but rather a necessity.

Again, the relationship between salvation and the elimination of freedom speaks to the genre’s deep structure. Zamyatin’s *One State* expresses the relationship clearly when it states: “When a man has his freedom taken away, he can no longer commit crimes ... therefore, if freedom is taken away, man has no choice but to become free from crime” (Zamyatin 31)—which reflects Bailey’s statement that good and bad choices will be taken away and “we will have no choice but to be good.” The context for both novels represents that the cost of a society without sin is the removal of the will, which can commit sin. Zamyatin also provides a religious description of what Bailey’s religious doctrine states: “We come from God; I come from the Devil.” (Zamyatin 110)—this quote can be placed at the top of *The Circle*’s war on privacy, where the first-person singular, the secret, and information withheld is the sin, from which transparency saves the individual. That confession is to save individuals is not an accident. Foucault (1978) argues that within Western society, confession is the primary means of creating the truth of oneself and that “Western



man has become a confessing animal,” this technique is now the technique used by *The Circle* to define the existence of its population, changing a one-time sacrament into an ongoing method of control through constant surveillance.

The entire discourse of conversion is also completed by the convert's experience. The audience in which Mae gives the three commandments (as an altar call), and as she does so, “Mae turned to look at the three lines together; she blinked back tears, seeing it all there ...”; Bailey thanks Mae for her honesty, intelligence, and great love; and the audience is on its feet (Eggers 302-303). The testimony provided by Mae culminates in a public declaration of her “Going transparent immediately.” (Eggers 303). From here the language used to describe becoming a transparent individual becomes a systematic language. To become a completely transparent person, one must “go clear,” and each time someone becomes a transparent person, a “Clarification” ceremony is created to purify that person, and the company states the spreading of that ceremony is “inevitable.” (Eggers 325). Later, when Mae betrays the trust of her friend, she uses her deceptive confession to “re-purify her own transparency from that day,” and the program that she uses to accomplish this is named “Soul Search.” (Eggers 441). The company acts as both a witness and a judge, seeking and purifying an individual's soul.

Finally, *The Circle* introduces the doctrine of excess in a manner that reflects a charismatic mode of revelation. For instance, Bailey designates the See Change camera as the equivalent of a “Second Enlightenment,” and the commandment of the Second Enlightenment is issued by Bailey in capital letters: “ALL THAT HAPPENS MUST BE KNOWN” (Eggers 67). Once Mae becomes transparent, she describes “feeling the affections of millions who come to her,” which illustrates that the act of being transparent represents a connection with the millions who observe her and those millions that she observes (Eggers 311). Later, as Mae's “words” are cast in steel and placed on a wall of the office building, they are transformed into “scripture,” and she continues to act as a “disciple” of the teachings of those “words.” (Eggers 325). Lastly, *The Circle* provides for the ultimate sin. Withholding knowledge is the same as stealing knowledge, because knowledge is declared to be “basic human right” and therefore any use of privacy is theft from the human community (Eggers 301-302). Under this doctrine, the camera serves as a means of judgement. Bailey praises See Change for providing “instant accountability,” because there is sufficient observation to detect any wrongdoing as it occurs, and thus prevent the wrongdoing before it



occurs (Eggers 66). In the theology of *The Circle*, judgement is not postponed until the Last Day but rather is made continuously available; the all-seeing eye is located in the present and will provide continuous judgement of the actions of individuals.

4.3 *The Eschaton Named: "Completion"*

The exceptional accomplishment achieved in "*The Circle*" is its explicit revelation of eschatology. The end of history has a clear designation as "Completion," and it exists within the context of an impending apocalypse. Transparency is provided through various cryptic slogans posted throughout the campus such as "THINK COMPLETION," "COMPLETE THE CIRCLE," and "*THE CIRCLE* MUST BE WHOLE" (Eggers, 2013, p. 322). Currently, there is very little in the way of definition surrounding what Completion means—"No one knew what Completion was" (Eggers, 2013, p. 322). This lack of identity contributes to the numinous of this term as it is seen as the mystery that awaits a solution. Staff members are charged with "contemplating" this and inscribing their hopes on an idea board that fill up with millennial promises: "*The Circle* will cure world hunger"; "*The Circle* helps me to discover who I am" and, remarkably, "There will never again be any data, human, numeric, emotional, or historical that is lost" (Eggers, 2013, p. 311). The presentation by Bailey of Completion to Mae serves as the theological core of the text and is entirely composed using a language of perfection and totality. "*The Circle*," he informs her, is attempting to achieve completion as well. Graceful curvatures arise within the symbol of *The Circle* as the breakage of the open letter "c" transforms into the perfect circle:

"A circle is the strongest shape in the universe. Nothing can beat it, nothing can improve upon it, nothing can be more perfect. And that's what we want to be: perfect. So any information that eludes us, anything that's not accessible, prevents us from being perfect." (Eggers, 2013, p. 287).

The reasoning posited by Bailey follows the eschatological framework outlined by Löwith: perfection is described as totality; totality is the removal of all that "eludes"; and all that eludes must be eliminated to complete *The Circle*. For Phase III of the epistemology of the phase of redemption, he relies on the image of the mirror: a broken mirror gives a "twisted and broken" view of something; a whole mirror provides "everything" accurately and "is, therefore, true" (Eggers, 2013, p. 287)—that is to say, "reality". Based on this premise, "truth" is synonymous with "completeness"; thus, partial knowledge equates to



non-truth. The closing of *The Circle* is the acquisition of the unbroken mirror through which, for once, the world visualizes itself as complete, or the technological equivalent of the theological promise that “the redeemed shall know . . . even as also I am known.

The Circle is not selected as the ultimate symbol of perfection arbitrarily; it carries with it a substantial historical theological basis that has been capitalized on within the text. In the history outlined by Georges Poulet (1966), *The Circle*, or the sphere whose “center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere,” was once for generations the very symbol of God. It represented perfectness, enclosed on itself only, and an absolute totality, once only used as a descriptor for a divine reference; in fact, it was after the Renaissance, that *The Circle*/sphere became singular to man. By portraying *The Circle* as “the strongest thing in the universe” and holding that “there is no shape greater than a circle,” Bailey literally seeks to make allusion to the oldest symbol of God in Western culture, and completing *The Circle* means much more than corporate growth; it also includes the deification of the world, or man’s ultimate goal of completing the perfect shape that God created. Therefore, if the incomplete logo of *The Circle* is to reflect God, the open letter “c” becomes the waiting God for the necessity of completing Him; and “Completion” becomes the prime example of when God becomes fully developed in the world.

The concept of Completion is not only an end with relation to eschatology but is also not an end that is a business goal as well. The text’s most disillusioned character backs that up by affirming this very idea to Mae, specifically stating “Completion is the end. We are closing *The Circle* around everyone—it is a totalitarian nightmare” (Eggers, 2013, p. 481). Ty’s wording combines two forms posited by Löwith, that is “Completion is the telos (or ultimate end)—that is the purpose of all things” and “Completion is also the terminus—that is where nothing will happen again because the option of the open future has been eliminated” (Eggers, 2013, p. 481). “There once existed an option of being an opt out; not anymore” Ty states to Mae. When he earlier states that the “fucking shark that eats the world” (Eggers, 2013, p. 479) is representative of the entire campus, he describes the text’s apocalyptic beast; as in the consuming totality of all things and you won’t find anything that is outside of it. In conclusion, “Completion” is the eschaton by virtue of being identified in the corporate world.

Moreover, Completion is believed to usher in a world of redemption within the absolute sense of the word. Total knowledge, Bailey explains, will allow us to cure all that is wrong in the world: diseases, wars; food



insecurities etc.; we will have no weaknesses; we will conceal nothing from each other; we can find the condition of our potential (Eggers, 2013, p. 292). Thus, the text catalogs that act of removing all human limitations will occur in the same way as in biblical accounts (new creation), All will be removed through total knowledge, and the final condition of the world as redeemed will involve the removal of plurality. Mae recognizes that once "all doors (are) opened, physically and metaphorically, there can only exist one truth" and a follower completes "there can only be one morality, one set of rules" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 297, 395). At the time that the eschaton will arrive, there will be no second point of view behind the entire mirror.

The continued ambition to "close *The Circle* around everyone" shares a commonality with the similar works of Zamyatin in his book, Zamyatin (2021), queried where the One State builds a spaceship named Integral to deliver "mathematically perfect happiness" (Zamyatin, 2021, p. 1) to an unknown new world; and if their new world is resistant to their arrival, "Then we will force them to become happy." The nature of the eschaton is universal; it does not allow for anything existing outside of its restoration on one complete circle; Completion is *The Circle's* Integral; thus, Ty's description of "closing *The Circle* around everyone" immediately describes a "totalitarian nightmare" (Eggers, 2013, p. 481) encompassing the concept of universalized salvation from followers of *The Circle* is, to observers, nothing short of conquest.

4.4 The Abolition of Death and Suffering

A third diagnostic marker for an eschatology, the fulfillment of death, and the restoration of pain and suffering. The novel's author is most audacious in its proclamation here. Bailey's claim that "no information -- human, quantitative, qualitative, or historical -- will ever again be subject to loss" makes a claim of resurrection regarding information: nothing written about our past will ever die. The various programs offered by the corporation pursue immortality through total recollection, such that one's identity will outlive the human experience of death through the continuous retention of their digital data (Eggers 2013, 311). As Mae states in response to Ty's question regarding how anyone could want to be always observed: "I need to know that I am seen; I need to know that I existed... I believe if most people had the opportunity to see themselves as they were in life, and to know they would be remembered somehow, they would give anything that they had, all of their knowledge and relationships, to be able to know that they existed as well as they recognized that they would continue to exist." (Eggers, 2013, 485). The desire to be remembered can be further understood as a desire for eternal



life, and transparency is represented as the means to this end — when we are continually observed, we do not fully die.

Similarly, the redemption of pain and suffering is inherent in the promise of *The Circle*. In an overwhelming passage, Mae rationalizes that there is no such thing as pain if it can be experienced publicly: “If others see how you are suffering, you are not really suffering anymore; the only way you are suffering is in a state of suffering within the confines of your own personal existence. Suffering in front of a multitude of loving followers is communion (Eggers 2013, 440).” “Communion” in this case is the appropriate word; it is undoubtedly sacramental because the private wound, made public to a multitude, will now have the essence of koinenia. This very process is what Löwith identified as the foundational, dangerous principle of eschatology: the “grand cover-up of human suffering” that presents a false sense of redemption through the promise of redemption by establishing an unsustainable relationship to death as a means of remembering and communicating our existence in a way that is disconnected from reality (Chorell 2021, 182). *The Circle* does not remove suffering; it claims to remove suffering through the act of making public rather than establishing an actual claim to remove suffering.

In the final pages of the novel, the culmination of the eschatological process occurs, as Mae looks at her future, which will be nothing but light, and she believes everything prior to this moment in history will have been forgotten because of the light:

“All of that would be, so soon, replaced by a new and glorious openness, a world of perpetual light. Completion was imminent, and it would bring peace, and it would bring unity, and all that messiness of humanity until now, all those uncertainties that accompanied the world before *The Circle*, would be only a memory.” (Eggers, 2013, 490).

This passage can be interpreted as a secular version of the new heaven and new earth of Revelation, in which God will “wipe away every tear from the eyes” of all that experience loss and death. “Perpetual light,” “peace,” “unity,” all become professional memories of the event that will be the culmination of the previous history of man. Each of the preceding terms will refer to Christian eschatological hope, with the only difference being that the agent of perfection will not be God, but a corporation and the result of the event will not be eternity, but the next four quarters. The statement that “coming” is an apocalyptic statement; it indicates the beginning of the end. Eggers' brilliance is to let the reader see the sweetness of that coming to an end, but feel the horror of its brevity, because the image is so beautiful, and it is beautiful in precisely



the same way that most of the modern religions of progress are false and beautiful.

4.5 The Anti-Eschatological Remnant

A salvation history is determined not only by its chosen ones but also by those who reject the good news. Two characters in *The Circle* serve as anti-eschatological critiques. The first is Mercer, Mae's ex-boyfriend, who prophesizes against idolatry, "We can't know everything, Mae," he says, "we need the mystery of night and the brightness of day. YOU are creating a new world without the benefit of the night—the world will be full of bright, eternal light, and it will destroy us all!" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 430–431). Mercer objects on theological grounds; he defends the importance of obscurity, of the secrets, of what is with-held; this is the same darkness that *The Circle*'s teaching of "everlasting light" intends to remove. He describes *The Circle*'s expansion as a "second great schism"—two separate but parallel peoples—and he refers to *The Circle*'s expansion as "the unbridled manifest destiny of all of this," which exposes the secularity of *The Circle*'s advancement as a chosen people pursuing the promised land (Eggers, 2013, pp. 367, 436–437). Mercer's death cements his position as the novel's martyr; after being pursued across the country by a cacophony of laughing and digitally-communicating witnesses who are chanting "Submit to us, submit to our will, be our friend!" and "You can't escape, Mercer, it's too late" he drives his truck through a guardrail and appears to "fly" for a period of time before he falls to his death (Eggers, 2013, pp. 460). It is a grotesque parody of evangelism; a conversion required on penalty of death; and Mercer's temporary ascent before his fall mirrors the martyr's journey away from a complete and total order only to escape the world altogether through his suicide. The closure of *The Circle* describes the author's underlying message about the eschaton; once *The Circle* is closing in on itself, there will be no "other" from which the dissenter can depart, and therefore, to reject will mean death.

The second dissenter is Ty himself, creator turned away from his creation. His warnings are clear: "*The Circle* can't close;" "this will be bad-for humanity;" "completion is far beyond anything that is good" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 480–481)—and his warnings articulate the Löwithian thesis: the danger is not surveillance, but the attempt to bring History to a close; to create an end (Eggers, 2013, pp. 480–481). While Ty does not accomplish any victory within the pages of the book, although Mae betrays him with "a kind of duty that felt holy," reporting his heresy as an apostate would betray a tempter, and the book concludes with a total Circle victory (Eggers, 2013, p. 490). The last line cement's the point. As



Mae watches over her comatose friend, Annie, whose mind is the last unseeable place for the corporation, she becomes convinced that this last immateriality is itself an offence: “Why shouldn’t they know? The world deserved that knowledge and could not wait for it” (Eggers, 2013, p. 491)—which means the “eschaton” is represented as the completed, fully illuminated reality, which will not tolerate a single, unlit space, and that every aspect of humanity’s innermost life becomes an “offence” or “deprivation” (Eggers, 2013, p. 491). By closing *The Circle* around the last space hidden from view, the book closes out the completion of its secular apocalypse.

The salient point regarding Ty’s fall is made clear by Ty himself; he only wanted “to make the web more civil,” to “bring together a thousand different parts and make them one;” he “never thought about [a] world where membership in *The Circle* is a requirement; or, where government and life are run entirely by one network” (Eggers, 2013, p. 480). He intended his created network (his plan) to be a bounded improvement to humanity; what it became was an absolute. In this way, Eggers expresses the phenomenon of slippage articulated by Löwith; a finite plan of creating a better society is drawn, almost magnetically, to the emptiness of an absolute end. The inability of the creator to limit his creation; that completion is progressing “too quickly” and “far beyond anything that’s right,” regardless of his will; defines the logic of the eschaton as an event of causation (once triggered) that extends beyond even the will of its creators (Eggers, 2013, pp. 479–480).

Zamyatin provides a similar model here too. We illustrate that when D-503’s “incurable soul” awakens, it is to be surgically fixed—as an illness—by removing the ability to imagine—“Extirpate the imagination, surgery is the solution”—and the last line of Zamyatin’s book is the mandatory “Operation” which will remove imagination from every citizen, restoring everyone to the same seamless, agreed-upon state (Zamyatin, 2021, pp. 77, 166). Ty and Mercer are the D-503s for *The Circle*; they represent the last vestige of inner being (“the mysteries of the night,” the reserved self), the end of which must be removed from an altogether completed assembly. While Zamyatin imagines the removal of desire by way of “lobotomy,” Eggers depicts the removal of the last message of “the unwatched” thought or memory when Mae sells out the ability of even her comatose friend to have their own thoughts and dreams. In both books, the eschaton can occur only when the human soul, the last hidden place for the “I,” is finally revealed; and in each case, the revelation is represented by the faithful as care and not violence.

5. Discussion



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*



Reading *The Circle* as secular eschatology does not supersede the surveillance, transhumanist and political readings so much as it unites them under one explanatory roof. What the panoptic reading indicated as disciplinary visibility, the eschatological reading sees as judgement—the living judgement of the eye before which sin is impossible and the good unavoidable (Eggers, 2013, pp. 289–290; cf. Foucault, 1977; Han, 2015). What the transhumanist reading presented as human enhancement, the eschatological reading conceives as glorification—the realization of the promised humanity that “will finally realize our potential” (Eggers, 2013, p. 292; cf. Laguarta Bueno, 2018). And what the political reading diagnosed as the colonization of democracy by corporate force, the eschatological reading understands as the abolition of politics itself, necessary only as the condition to which the end of history leads when it is already understood to be present, as “only one truth” exists which there is to be no deliberation about (Eggers, 2013, p. 297; cf. Maurer and Rostbøll, 2020; Arendt, 1998).

The three preeminent readings are thus not competitors to this one but parts of it. What this reading offers is a clarifying account of why the dystopia takes the shape that it does. Schmitt's (2005) idea that “all ... political concepts are secularized theological concepts” finds in *The Circle* almost a diagrammatic realization: as the company appropriates the signs of sovereignty—omniscience, the power to judge, the promise of salvation—that Western thought once supplicated to a God and then transferred to a state. *The Circle* is a gesture in corporate political theology, a private sovereignty whose governance comes by dispensing not law but grace. That is why, as Maurer and Rostbøll (2020) remark, their “instant accountability” offers no deliberative time from which democracy derives its reason: an eschaton does not deliberate, it reveals. Rectenwald's (2019) “private governmentality” and the “Google Archipelago” name this same sovereignty from without; the eschatological reading provides its inner theology. Zuboff's (2019) anatomy of surveillance capitalism then provides this corporate sovereignty its contemporary economic body. Zuboff calls a “Big Other” that knows and shapes behaviour toward guaranteed outcomes “instrumentarian power”, the Coursera of *The Circle*'s promised sameness. This Big Other is the material infrastructure of the perfection it promises, and its goal, “a utopia of certainty”, might serve as a subtitle to Completion itself. Finally, Voegelin (1952) provides the theological anatomy that Zuboff's economics presupposes, that *The Circle* imagines in its strivings for completion (its name for the goal of this imaginary).

The Circle dramatizes what he called the three “varieties of immanentization” together: it is teleological in its march toward a foreseen goal, axiological in its conviction that this goal is the supreme good, and activist in its determination to bring the goal about by force—the composite that Voegelin found to mark the modern “gnostic” movements that confuse “a concrete society and its order” for the eschaton. That this immanent faith is American is no accident. *The Circle*’s creed is a species of the civil religion that Robert Bellah identified, and Mercer’s name for the company’s expansion— “the unrestrained Manifest Destiny of it all” (Eggers, 2013, p. 367)—is exactly the name for the merger of providence and nation that Bellah, and after him Casanova (1994), examined as the secular theology of a chosen people salvaging the world. And finally, thanks to Kermode’s (1967) *The Sense of an Ending*, we can define the salience of this novel’s “danger” more precisely. Kermode argued that human beings project “fictions” of an End to give meaning to the “middle” of experience that is “unshaped” and “chaotic,” and that those fictions become dangerous when they take themselves for the fiction that they are; when the “sense of an ending” begins to imprint its imaginative form on the historical present and no longer merely points to it. Kermode “End” is precisely such a rigidity; Completion is a realization of the fiction of an End, a remaking of an orienting story into an operational programme. This is the step by which, in Löwith’s (1949) phrase, “the modern construction of history as linear progression becomes dangerous,” Because the regime that thinks it knows how to heal “the plight of the world” will sacrifice the actual present to the manufactured future. Mercer’s death and Annie’s collapse are the local instances of that sacrifice; the “messiness of humanity” reduced to “memory” is its horizon (Eggers, 2013, p. 490).

It is here that Svenungsson’s (2016) recovery of the prophetic tradition becomes analytically useful, for it names what *The Circle* lacks. Against both Löwith’s anti-utopian resignation and the totalizing eschatology the novel depicts, Svenungsson defends a prophetic vision of justice as “a never-completed task”—a future that judges the present without ever being collapsed into the present so that “we can thus never be complacent about existing systems” (Chorell, 2021, pp. 185–186). *The Circle* is the exact inversion of this open future. Its eschaton is not a horizon that measures the present but a terminus that abolishes the present; its “Completion” is the materialized utopia “as an end of history, where nothing will have to change again”—the death of history as such (Chorell, 2021, p. 186). The tragedy of *The Circle* is that it can imagine the critique—it gives it to Mercer and Ty—but it cannot let it win,



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*



because a closed circle admits no outside from which critique might be sustained. In this sense the Löwith–Blumenberg debate is quietly staged within the plot; Ty's original ambition simply "to make the web more civil" and "more elegant" resembles Blumenberg's (1983) legitimate modern self-assertion, a bounded human project; its metastasis into Completion is the illegitimate re-occupation of the vacant place of God that Löwith feared (Eggers, 2013, p. 480).

The reading also speaks to a wider development in contemporary fiction. If, as Eve and Street (2018) argue, the "Silicon Valley novel" has emerged as a distinct form, the analysis suggests that its animating anxiety is not merely economic or technological but theological: these are narratives about corporations that assume the functions of providence. *The Circle*'s promise of a "world of perpetual light" (Eggers, 2013, p. 490) is continuous with a real, extra-fictional rhetoric of technological hope, and reading the novel as secular eschatology helps explain why its satire cuts so deep—it exposes the religious longing that a disenchanted culture—one from which, in Weber's classic sense, enchantment and ultimate shared meaning have withdrawn (cf. Tribe, 2018)—channels into its machines (Taylor, 2007). What Bauman and Lyon (2013) call "liquid surveillance" is, on this account, the administrative face of a soteriology, and the camera the sacrament of a faith that dares not name itself as one. To read *The Circle* in this way is therefore not to retreat from its politics, but to reach the ground beneath them, where the desire to be watched and the desire to be saved leak side by side, in the digital dystopia, through the same window.

Two limits of the present reading should be acknowledged. First, the eschatological framework is an interpretive lens, not a claim about authorial intention; Eggers needed not read Löwith for the novel to instantiate the structure Löwith described, because that structure is, on Löwith's own account, embedded in the deep grammar of Western modernity (Taylor, 2007). Second, we emphasise the Christian eschatological archetype most legible in the Anglo-American context the novel satirizes; a comparative study might test the reading against Jewish messianic and other traditions of the End, along the lines Svenungsson (2016) and Vattimo (2002) pursue, and against the wider "digital turn" in dystopian fiction mapped by Mastroianni Greco (2024) and Beckman (2020). These are extensions, not objections: they indicate the reach of the framework rather than its failure. The claim—that *The Circle* is organized, from its Edenic opening to its apocalyptic close, as a secular eschatology, and that that is the structure its earlier critics have described in part without naming in whole—stands.



6. Conclusion

This essay has argued that the ideology of transparency in Dave Eggers' *The Circle* is most comprehensible not as surveillance or transhumanism, the capitalist subsumption of democracy or digital self-mastery, but as a secular eschatology in the sense traced to the word by Karl Löwith. Read through Löwith's secularization thesis and Voegelin's account of the immanentized eschaton, the novel reveals, with the aid of Schmitt's political theology and Kermode's poetics of the ending, a coherent salvation history transposed into a technological key—the most recent iteration of a lineage of transparency dystopias that runs back through Orwell and Huxley to Zamyatin's *We*. It opens in an Edenic "heaven" against the fallen world of "noise and struggle, failure and filth" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 1, 30); it defines sin as secrecy and offers redemption through confession and the conversion ritual of "going clear" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 289–290, 303, 325); it promises to abolish death through the endlessness of data and to redeem suffering as communion (Eggers, 2013, pp. 311, 440, 485); and it names its end of history "Completion", an immanent eschaton of "perpetual light" that will bring "peace" and "unity", reducing the old humanity to "memory" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 287, 490).

The interpretive gain of this reframing is twofold. Analytically, it unifies the existing scholarship, demonstrating that judgement, glorification and the abolition of politics are not separate anxieties but successive moments in a single soteriological structure. Critically, it locates the novel's deepest warning precisely where the novel itself locates it: not in the fact that *The Circle* sees too much, but in its ambition to complete history, to close *The Circle* around the last secret, and declare the end achieved. That ambition is, for Löwith, the characteristic and catastrophic temptation of secular modernity—an immanentizing of heaven on earth that does not deliver paradise but totalitarian abolition of the open future. When Mae resolves, at the end of the novel, that even the dreams of a comatose friend need to be known because "the world deserved nothing less and would not wait", Eggers gives that temptation its perfected voice (Eggers, 2013, p. 491).

Against the closed circle the novel's defeated dissenters manage to preserve the memory of an alternative: Mercer's insistence that "our souls need the mysteries of night", Ty's deep recognition that "*The Circle* can't close" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 430, 480). Their protest is, in the end, a plea for the very thing a secular eschatology cannot abide—an unfinished world, a future that judges the present without consuming it, a justice that remains, in Svenungsson's phrase, "a never-completed task" (Chorell, 2021, p. 186). *The Circle* is a warning against completion itself.



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*

Its continued relevance lies in the insight that the most dangerous utopia is not the one that promises to watch us, but the one that promises to save us, and that the refusal to let *The Circle* close may be (in the digital age as in every age) the beginning of freedom.

References

- H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998 (orig. 1958).
- M. Atwood, "When Privacy Is Theft," *The New York Review of Books*, Nov. 21, 2013. [Online]. Available: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/eggers-circle-when-privacy-is-theft/>
- Z. Bauman and D. Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2013.
- F. Beckman, "Control and the Novel: Dave Eggers and Disciplinary Form," *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3, pp. 527–546, 2020.
- J. Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*, M. Božovič, Ed. London, U.K.: Verso, 1995.
- R. N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, vol. 96, no. 1, pp. 1–21, 1967.
- H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, R. M. Wallace, Trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.
- M. K. Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994.
- T. G. Chorell, "Unsecularizing History and Politics: Jayne Svenungsson and Karl Löwith on Meaning in History," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 82, no. 2, pp. 177–192, 2021.
- N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.
- D. Eggers, *The Circle*. London, U.K.: Penguin Books, 2013.
- M. P. Eve and J. Street, "The Silicon Valley Novel," *Literature and History*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 81–97, 2018.
- M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan, Trans. London, U.K.: Penguin, 1977.
- M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, R. Hurley, Trans. London, U.K.: Penguin, 1978 (orig. 1976).
- B.-C. Han, *The Transparency Society*, E. Butler, Trans. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2015.
- [17] P. C. Herman, "More, Huxley, Eggers, and the Utopian/Dystopian Tradition," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 165–193, 2018.



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers' Dystopian Novel *The Circle*



- A. Huxley, *Brave New World*. London, U.K.: Chatto & Windus, 1932.
- D. İşik, "A Foucauldian Reading of Dave Eggers's *The Circle*," *Journal of Modernism and Postmodernism Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 154–162, 2020.
- B. Jarvis, "Surveillance and Spectacle inside *The Circle*," in *Surveillance, Architecture and Control: Discourses on Spatial Culture*, S. Flynn and A. Mackay, Eds. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 275–293.
- F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967.
- C. Laguarta Bueno, "Transhumanism in Dave Eggers's *The Circle*: Utopia vs. Dystopia, Dream vs. Nightmare," *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 22, pp. 165–188, 2018.
- K. Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949.
- G. Mastroianni Greco, "Digital Individual Freedoms in Danger in Eggers's Dystopias: Surveillance, Shame, Power, and Human Perfection," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 213–227, 2024.
- K. Maurer and C. F. Rostbøll, "Demoxie: Reflections on Digital Democracy in Dave Eggers's Novel *The Circle*," *First Monday*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2020.
- T. More, *Utopia*, D. Wootton, Trans. and Ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003 (orig. 1516).
- G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London, U.K.: Secker & Warburg, 1949.
- G. Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of The Circle*, C. Dawson and E. Coleman, Trans. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966.
- M. Rectenwald, *Google Archipelago: The Digital Gulag and the Simulation of Freedom*. London, U.K.: New English Review Press, 2019.
- C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, G. Schwab, Trans. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005 (orig. 1922).
- W. Styfals, "Evil in History: Karl Löwith and Jacob Taubes on Modern Eschatology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 76, no. 2, pp. 191–213, 2015.
- J. Svenungsson, *Divining History: Prophetism, Messianism and the Development of the Spirit*, S. Donovan, Trans. New York, NY: Berghahn, 2016.
- C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007.
- K. Tribe, "Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation': Context, Genesis, Structure," *Sociologica*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1–12, 2018.
- G. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, L. d'Isanto, Trans. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002.
- E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952.



Transparency as Secular Eschatology in Dave Eggers's Dystopian Novel *The Circle*

M. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, Eds. and Trans. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1946, pp. 129–156 (orig. 1919).

Y. I. Zamyatin, *We*, C. Brown, Trans. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2021 (orig. 1924).

S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2019.

