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The Humanity of Posts

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> After the end of man, therefore, is also before man, but in between finality and renewal there might be a possibility to think 'man' or rather, the human, otherwise. This is the ambiguity which inhabits every 'post-'.
>
> —Stefan Herbrecher[1]

The seeds of posthumanism were planted in the origins of humanism itself. Prior to humanism, perhaps prior to the invention of the human (with Shakespeare?[2]), there was not a "human" to be after. With the invention of the human, the possibilities of something "after" human became implicit. This should be obvious. That it isn't illustrates the hegemonic reign of humanism, and the necessity for the emergence of antihumanist and posthumanist thinking.[3]

Many if not most theologians and philosophers recognize the value of the emergence of humanism and a focus on the human being in theological discourse. There are many gains, not the least of which is to place the human as such centrally

[1]Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) 16.

[2]Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 1999) 4: "Personality…is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness."

[3]Some thinkers of the past century are categorized as antihumanist in their outlook, because they pushed science or philosophy beyond humanist categories, including Charles Darwin (away from human and towards speciation and evolution), Sigmund Freud (away from the human and towards the ego), Friedrich Nietszche (who

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within the religious landscape, prioritized over the divisions by race, gender, or creed to which humans are prone. Think, for example, of the Danish reformer and humanist Nikolai Grundtvig's justly famous, and underutilized, insight, "Human first, then Christian."[4] Recognizing the common humanity of each other as the first step prior to categorizing ourselves along confessional or ideological lines is, for many reasons, a gain.

Tensions arise, however, in the shift "beyond" or "post" humanity. Who gets counted as human? Discussion of posthuman identity in a technological world most frequently centers around the cyborgization of the human or the rise of artificial intelligence. But the origins of posthumanity go deeper than this, originating in questions of who and what counts as a human at all (which ethnic groups, which genders, which sexual orientations—all those questions attending what is often called identity politics). Although the question framed by technology is whether or not robots count as human, or artificial intelligence, the larger posthumanist question is whether or not humanism itself is overly anthropocentric. Whereas humanism prioritizes human experiences over things, posthumanist theory, at least some of it, prioritizes things themselves.

Which is why I take time in this essay to consider the humanity of posts (the wooden ones). It's a pun, but a useful one. What is the identity or experience of a post, and how shall we account for it in a posthumanist manner that informs theological commitments? And a corollary question: To what degree are "post-" movements—posthumanity, postmodernism, and so on—themselves human or humane? These are the questions to which we turn.

What Do Posts Experience? (Object-Oriented Ontology)

There are many posthuman narratives we could examine as test cases for the humanity of posts. Consider the recent movie starring Johnny Depp, *Transcendence* (2013), Mary Shelley's classic book *Frankenstein* (1818), Octavia Butler's genre-bending science fiction novel *Xenogenesis* (1987), or more recent work grounded in the concept of the singularity, by Charles Stross, such as *Accelerando* (2005), or steampunk-infused literature such as Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2008). Each explores, in a variety of ways, technological or biological innovations that extend humanity beyond what might traditionally be regarded as human. Whether it is the transfer of the essentially human to the Internet, the reassembly of human life after death, the merging of human life with alien species,

believed humanism protected the weak and was too theological a category), and Karl Marx (who shifted things away from the human and towards class and economic structures). See also later philosophers such as Roland Barthes (whose poststructuralist view of technology develops these antihumanist themes in a posthuman direction), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (who may be the preeminent theorists of posthumanism), Michel Foucault (who deconstructs the human by shifting attention to the monster, the alien, the incarcerated), and Jacques Derrida (who argues, among other things, for the deconstruction of the "I" and a breakdown in linear distinctions between the animal and the human).

[4]This is an often-cited motto of Grundtvig, and is the title of one of his poems. See Viggo Mortensen, *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 478.

or the bodily enhancement of humans to a cyborg or biologically enhanced system, posthuman film and literature is replete with examples opening space for alternative definitions of posthumanity, typically also introducing the perils and opportunities of whatever comes "after" the human.

These are endlessly engaging imaginative arcs. No wonder they repeatedly present themselves in film and literature. From a philosophical and theological perspective, however, there is an underlying dimension that offers at least a modicum of focus, a unifying dynamic for exploring posthumanity, and that is this: they are all invitations to think the human after the human, which means they are also invitations to think the experience of the nonhuman in the light of the human.

This is not always easy to accomplish. What does it mean for a nonhuman subject/thing to experience the world? Do nonhuman objects relate to other objects in any way comparable to the way humans do? Is there a subject there to inquire into, in the way human subjectivity thinks of the world in reference to itself? Or are objects qua objects their own kind of thing?

"posthuman and posthumanist therefore also means this: to acknowledge all those ghosts, all those human others that have been repressed during the process of humanization: animals, gods, demons, monsters of all kinds"

Thus arises the recent movement in philosophy known as object-oriented ontology (OOO).[5] OOO rejects the privileging of the human over nonhuman objects. It is in this sense posthuman in outlook, because it is a school of philosophy that is decidedly after (or even anti-) humanities. The humanities, as a discipline, which thinks of itself as expansive and capacious, is itself narrow in scope, anthropocentric, because it considers most of the world, most of life, from the perspective of and prioritizing the human. As alternative, "posthuman and posthumanist therefore also means this: to acknowledge all those ghosts, all those human others that have been repressed during the process of humanization: animals, gods, demons, monsters of all kinds."[6]

The call from the posthumanities is for "institutional framework[s] in which the new forms of critical knowledge production about posthuman and anthropodecentred humans and their environments will take place."[7] Instead of inquiring philosophically or theologically within the framework of the human as the subject and everything as objects of the subjective perspective, OOO distributes subjectivity out to objects themselves and establishes subjectivity all the way down, onto-

[5]The theme song for this movement is probably *Everything Is Awesome*, performed by Teegan and Sarah in *The Lego Movie*, directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014. For an excellent introduction to OOO, see http://www.thedewlab.com/blog/2012/07/12/introduction-to-object-oriented-ontology/ (accessed January 5, 2015).

[6]Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*, 9.

[7]Ibid., 20.

logically, beyond and around the human as subject. In OOO, the human becomes one subject (or one object) among many. Like the Copernican revolution, which shifted the center of the universe, the OOO revolution shifts the center of subjectivity to objects.

Humanity Haunting Humanity (HHH)

This revolution in thought, signified through a host of philosophers and increasingly influential in the humanities and theology, offers a starting point for the consideration of posthuman identity from a theological perspective.

> The prefix "post" therefore does not signify a radical break with humanism but a continued deconstructive-*cum*-psychoanalytical "working through," as Lyotard (1992) suggested for the "post" in "postmodern." That alone should make it clear that simply equating posthumanism with technoculture would be too narrow an understanding. Humanism was always inhabited by diverse posthumanisms, which mostly referred to the ghosts of post- or nonhumanity, the end of man, designed to lead to a renewal of the humanist principle. Posthumanism is thus related to the repressed of humanist tradition, which constantly haunts humans in uncanny ways.[8]

Posthumanism is elusive in this sense, because the origins of the revolution that is posthumanism reside in humanism itself, but in the way objects are in the world phenomenologically, irreducibly withdrawn (à la the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl). If posthumanism is an "object" for our consideration (perhaps even, as we will see, a hyperobject), then there is a sense in which we cannot get closer to it precisely because of its irreducible withdrawnness. Like Johnny Depp in *Transcendence*, who seems more and more strange to his family and friends the closer they get to him as a human consciousness migrated to a computer network, the concept of posthumanism always eludes our grasp inasmuch as we are ourselves embedded in the humanity of posthumanism and already experiencing aspects of our posthumanity. We are not able to step outside to peer in at what this thing is that we call posthuman. "Things are themselves, but we can't point to them directly."[9]

Some things are especially helpful to consider not just as objects, but as hyperobjects. For Morton, hyper-objects are not "simply mental (or otherwise ideal) constructs, but are real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans."[10] Examples of hyperobjects in Morton's work include global warming, outer space, and racism. What hyperobjects do is take us to an even more extreme space than the elusiveness of objects themselves. In phenomenology, objects are irreducibly withdrawn. Hyperobjects withdraw and, in so doing, take the Copernican revolution a step further. There really is no center, and we don't inhabit it, and

[8]Ibid., 48–49.

[9]Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) 12.

[10]Ibid., 15.

there isn't even an edge. There is no center to humanity, no center to whatever we might call posthumanity, and in fact there is no edge between the two where we can readily say, "Here, at this point, we have made the shift from human to posthuman. Here we cross over to the other side."

Again, returning to the movie *Transcendence,* Johnny Depp's character, though he becomes strange as an artificial intelligence, actually remains more human than the humans give him credit for. At the end of the movie, they discover that although they had killed humans in order to try and destroy this growing power they feared, in fact Depp himself had remained, in many ways, distinctly or even *hyper*-human, designing tools that held people at bay but did not kill them, and always working to heal and improve the human condition. In his final encounter with his wife, who dies from an injury incurred from weapons fired by the military, he tells her he found a way back—he has used advanced nano- and biotechnology of his own devising (he *is* the singularity!) to create a human body and reinhabit it after his own physical death. She says, "It really is you." And he replies, "It was always me."

It was always me. This is what the posthuman says to the human. We are us.

Humanity in its experience of being posthuman now is confronted with the self-reflexive problem of being its own hyperobject. Let's label this *hyperhumanity*. I like Morton quite a lot on this, so I will quote him in an early section of his work on hyperobjects: "As I reach for the iPhone charger plugged into the dashboard, I reach into evolution, into the *extended phenotype* that doesn't stop at the edge of my skin but continues into all the spaces my humanness has colonized."[11] Marshall McLuhan talked about this as extensions of the human. Whether we consider it an extension, or a colonization, the point remains that we are no longer as certain as we once were where the human ends and the rest of the world begins. We are hyperhuman now, irreducibly so, and so irreducibly withdrawn. We find the exploration of the very thing in which we are complicated and entwined mystifying because our focus on humans as the center has become ironically the origin of our decentering.

Hyperhumanity and the Old (and New) Adam

Although we have been speaking of these matters in conversation with philosophy, rich resources in biblical and Christian perspective on hyperhumanity exist. Think of the irreducible withdrawnness of Christ's own humanity. Christ in his two natures makes his humanity quite real, available objectively, but withdrawn in its availability. As soon as we say, "Christ is fully human," we must immediately add, "And fully God." As soon as we say, "Christ is present," we must immediately add, "Christ is ascended."

The elusiveness of Christ's humanity goes far deeper than simply these con-

[11]Ibid., 27.

fessional or christological considerations. Christ's hyperhumanity introduces us even to the withdrawnness of objects as it impinges on contemporary understandings of physics. Take, for example, how in quantum physics reality becomes nonlocal, and the temporal nature of experience is radicalized. So too at the beginning of Acts, Christ's first teaching concerning his second coming goes, "It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority" (1:7). Verses 8 and 9 then set up a fascinating parallel. In verse 8, Christ promises that the disciples will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In verse 9, Christ is lifted up and recedes out of their sight on a cloud. Although these two verses are typically separated, with verse 9 becoming the locus for the teaching of the ascension, and verse 8 becoming one center for the missiological impulse to take the gospel to all nations, in fact what the two actually share in common is a message of the nonlocality of the gospel. Just as Jesus becomes nonlocal in his ascension, so too the disciples and their message will become nonlocal, or better, local and nonlocal simultaneously.

The vitality of the gospel rests in its not being a static thing, containing graspable and concrete properties. The gospel cannot be pinned to the wall, taken out and pressed into service in repetitious mechanical reproduction.

The hyperhumanity of Christ in his ascension thus complements and energizes the hypercommunicability of the gospel as nonlocal precisely in its locality. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. From the disciples to the right hand of the Father (wherever that is!). In the case of the gospel, it means the gospel relates and connects, perhaps not unlike the way quantum theory describes object interactions. No object, in quantum theory, has any intrinsic property at all. "Instead, each object should be regarded as something containing only incompletely defined potentialities that are developed when an object interacts with an appropriate system."[12] The vitality of the gospel rests in its not being a static thing, containing graspable and concrete properties. The gospel cannot be pinned to the wall, taken out and pressed into service in repetitious mechanical reproduction.[13] It is, as the author of Hebrews says, "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12). It can do so because the potentialities of what the gospel is up to are only defined in the interactions it causes. The gospel is an example of a hyperobject.

So too Christ's ascension becomes an integral part, a parallel to, the gospel's interactive potentiality. Christ, by going away, encompasses his humanity while also embarrassing and humiliating humanity by exiting the scene. Christ as a hu-

[12]Ibid., 44.

[13]Note that although there is a *regula fidei* (rule of faith), it is notorious in having never been written down.

man being but also God becomes nonlocal, a nonlocality that "implies that the notion of being located at all is only epiphenomal to a deeper, atemporal implicate order."[14] By becoming nonlocal, which in traditional metaphysics implies nonreality, Jesus Christ in his ascension actually may take on greater reality. Although the play here between quantum theory and gospel proclamation may be running descriptive risks in attempts to chase the metaphor down, we might say that the gospel of Christ's ascension is more attuned to the world as we now know it than the world as we used to know it. And that is something.

So what does this have to do with posthumanity? Well, in the New Testament, one central motif, perhaps dominant, is Christ's humanity before his death and resurrection, and his humanity after his resurrection. We see this in the resurrection narratives themselves, where Jesus is both known and not known in his resurrection, identifiable and not identifiable, human and posthuman. In the case of Jesus, it is not so much that Jesus becomes a cyborg or melds with an alien (as in much fiction). No, the precise way Jesus becomes posthuman is by becoming God (which he always already was), and bringing along with him humanity (which was always already created in the image of God).

> ***in New Testament perspective, humanity and things are brought onto the same plane—created by, sustained by, and gathered into God, who transcends them both***

"Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). In addition to the posthumanity of Jesus in his resurrection, we have the posthumanity of Jesus in his status as the post-Adam, the second Adam, the last Adam, the new Adam. Notice how close the old and new Adam are to each other. They are both Adam. They are both living. Paul here makes just one shift (well, two), from "living being" to "life-giving spirit." Life, liveliness are intrinsic to both, the first as something inherent, the second as something given and giving. It is almost as if the first Adam is an object traditionally construed, while the second Adam is a hyperobject, on the move and elusive and only identifiable in its relationality.

The New Testament also thingifies the good, or takes up into the life of God things themselves. Quite a bit of creation can be considered not simply "extensions of the human," things as mediating structures of the human, but in fact taken up into the life of God in the divine self. First, we have a turn in Paul towards the downgrading of the human towards things, "We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day" (1 Cor 4:13). Then, we have the upgrading of things into the life of God. "As a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10).

[14]Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 47.

"[I]n him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16–17). In New Testament perspective, humanity and things are brought onto the same plane—created by, sustained by, and gathered into God, who transcends them both. But then transcendence takes on completely new dimensions, as immanent to immanence, because the transcendent one has taken on human flesh, has become a thing.[15]

Missional DNA

This may be why Christ could so often hide in his own ministry. His transcendent immanence clouded his very visibility. Jesus is, in some senses, the anti-golden calf. He is a thing, sharing space and matter and time with things like the golden calf, but a life-giving spirit rather than static object—although this isn't quite the right way to speak of these matters. Clearly, the golden calf is not itself to blame for being idolized. The problem with the golden calf is not its being one object among others; the problem is in the use to which it is put, abstracting it out of other objects and elevating it to a transcendent plane to which it has no inherent relation. The golden calf is a problem only because it has been misplaced.

Christ, on the other hand, is misperceived and hides in plain sight. All the things the Israelites sought in the calf are rightly to be perceived in Christ, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. But few do, and precisely because of his hyperhumanity. As Rosi Braidotti writes, influenced by the work of Guattari and Deleuze, "The posthuman nomadic subject is materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded—it is firmly located somewhere, according to the radical immanence of the 'politics of location'. . . . it is a multi-faceted and relational subject."[16]

Christ hides in his ministry. Paul hides in his letters. As much as we readers of Scripture believe we meet Paul in the New Testament, what we really meet is his letters, those papery and rotting things. We do not even have the letters anymore, but merely copies and translations of the letters. Yet these extensions of Paul, in all their immanent thing-ness, are quite alive. We experience something in the reading of them. They themselves seem to have a life of their own quite apart from our reading of them. The letters, extensions of Paul's humanity, are a prime example of how early the cyborgization of humanity has taken place. Paul was a cyborg. His letters are the technology to which he connected. Paul is both himself and his letters. For us, he is in some ways more his letters than himself.

Even the Jew-Gentile division addressed by Paul in his letters is itself a topic not unrelated to these issues of hyperhumanity. Israel was quite interested in the

[15]Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility* (Chicago: ELCA, 2011) 13. I love this sentence in the ELCA Social Statement on Genetics, "The Word became flesh, took on a human genome, and lived among the abundance and sorrow of the earth and human culture." This can be found at http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/GeneticsSS.pdf (accessed January 7, 2015).

[16]Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013) 188.

topic of who counted as Israel. Paul, wrestling with the issue, decides quite a few more (many Gentiles) are Israel than many in Israel were willing to admit. Think of the grafting imagery of Rom 11. It is not simply that Paul combats racism, or ethnocentrism. Quite seriously, Paul takes up biological processes, and sees the mission of the church not simply as communicating a message, but grafting strange branches one to another, so that, like adoption, what was not native or genetically similar still shares in life.

Step back from a grafted tree, and soon, it becomes difficult to tell where one type of branch begins, and where another branch ends: different branches but still one tree. The mission of the church is a hypermission, transferring DNA, holding together that which traditional metaphysics, old school physics, and premodern biology, assumes is divisible. It takes up the possibility of *rhizomatic*[17] rather than *arborescent*[18] conceptions of mission. Where many force the duality of Gentile-Jew, Paul in his grafting imagery allows for the back-and-forth, endless reciprocity of systems that arise organically. Only this way of thinking can begin to comprehend a sentence like this from Romans: And even those of Israel, if they do "not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree" (11:23–24).

Like Johnny Depp in *Transcendence*, there is the impossible possibility that you might be a human who becomes a computer in order to become human again, and only being a computer maintained your humanity in the face of the inhumanity of humans. It might be that a Jew would need to count as nothing their Jewishness and become a Gentile in order to become a Jew again (1 Cor 9:22), and it might be, in other instances, that a Gentile might become a Jew in order to remain a Gentile (Acts 16:3). Only in this way can we begin to consider, as it were, the humanity of posts. ⊕

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[17]Rhizome in Gilles Deleuze's work is an "image of thought," based on the botanical rhizome, that apprehends multiplicities.

[18]For Deleuze, arborescent characterizes thinking marked by insistence on totalizing principles, binarism and dualism.