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Review

Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, *Cyborg Selves: A Theological Anthropology of the Posthuman*
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Jeanine Thweatt-Bates' *Cyborg Selves* is a welcome addition to a growing body of literature on Christian theological engagements with posthumanism. Unlike many other texts, *Cyborg Selves* aims to highlight the varied and, at times, incommensurable perspectives of the entire gamut of posthuman discourses. Thweatt-Bates' premise throughout the text is precisely that in failing to distinguish between these often competing visions, theologians have obfuscated which variant of posthumanism they respond to and, worse, have missed an opportunity to positively engage with at least one form of posthuman discourse: Donna Haraway's cyborg. Thweatt-Bates proposes to remedy this in her text and presents the reader with a robust cyborg theological anthropology.

The first part of the text begins with a very erudite and thorough introduction to these posthuman variants. She explains that posthumanism coalesces around two poles at present: cyborgs (Chapter One) and transhumanism (Chapter Two). It is in these first few chapters that she highlights the resounding discrepancy between the philosophical and scientific presuppositions of transhumanism and Haraway's cyborg.

Haraway's notion of the cyborg, Thweatt-Bates tells us, begins from a strong social scientific approach to science found in contemporary Science and Technology Studies. Haraway's cyborg physically represents the philosophical deterioration between culture/artefact and nature that is a central preoccupation in this field. For Haraway, the cyborg represents the inadequacy of techno-scientific ontological stasis and hence embodies a critique of boundary policing—whether in terms of gender, species or especially the natural/artificial divide. Thweatt-Bates points out that Haraway's cyborg is not meant for academic, disengaged speculation on the quandaries of straddling two ontologies but its real value is for politics and ethics—it is meant to move us towards greater affinity and coalition with all entities, particularly those that actually live embodied liminal existences.

Transhumanism, on the other hand, is an heir of the Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and agency and verges upon scientific tendencies. In the second and third chapters, Thweatt-Bates weaves a convincing argument that transhumanist anthropology is entirely monistic, with true personhood residing in information/mind and embodiment merely an incidental contingency.

A general strength of the entire book, manifested in these first few chapters, is Thweatt-Bates' ability to discern between differing voices on posthumanism and to deal with them separately and charitably. This is particularly visible in the chapter on transhumanism, in which she argues that democratic transhumanism, promoted by James Hughes, is less objectionable than other forms of transhumanism. These first chapters argue well the philosophical differences between transhumanist and cyborg approaches and, ultimately, Thweatt-Bates finds cyborg posthumanism the better theological conversation partner.

Chapters Four and Five house Thweatt-Bates' own theological construction in dialogue with Haraway's cyborg. Chapter Four briefly carries on recent scientific theological anthropologies that can be helpful in creating a robust cyborg theological anthropology. Thweatt-Bates utilises the work of Hefner, Garner and Shults to argue for an interpretation of the *imago dei* which is relational, continuous with the rest of creation and affirms the technologically creative elements of the human species. In this chapter and the next she explains that these components show a marked harmony with Haraway's understanding of the cyborg: they uphold an ontological similarity to, rather than disjunction from, other creatures and they place technically creative powers which are constantly incorporated into the self at the centre of the definition of "the human".

This leads into the climax of the book, Chapter Five. Here Thweatt-Bates' aim is twofold. First, she uses cyborg anthropology to 'restructure notions of human subjectivity and relationality, particularly within the context of Christian theological anthropologies' (p.142). Second, she connects the hybridity of the cyborg to other theologies which share this conception of hybridity: postcolonial, feminist, disabled and queer theologies. In so doing she claims to recover concepts present in the Christian tradition but that have been historically marginalised. The real strength of this chapter is in expounding upon this notion of hybridity and the multiform connections she makes to these other theologies. Her elucidation of disabled theology and its obvious connection to the enhancement/therapy issue in posthumanism is particularly insightful.

The final chapter then uses this idea of hybridity to re-evaluate the incessant philosophical tension between Christ's divinity and humanity within traditional Christology. This was the

weakest chapter in my estimation because its referencing of a very complex historical issue was scant and seemed, at times, like a rushed venture—much like the rest of the chapter. I was left wanting an entire book that constructed a Christology using this concept of hybridisation.

Several other issues arose. First, Thweatt-Bates clearly decries the transcendental elements of transhumanism while lauding the likes of Haraway for acknowledging the lived realities of actual cyborgs today. Yet this reader kept wondering if the cyborg actually had anything to say about what someone ought to do when faced with technologies that make us increasingly posthuman. I fail to see how the cyborg can act as a compass when I am in the doctor's office and faced with the decision whether I should install cochlear implants in my twilight years. In other words, is there an imperative to become more cyborg-like or is the cyborg solely a passive concept intended to invoke solidarity?

Second, I found that Thweatt-Bates' avowal of cyborg hope on the basis that 'hybridity implies connection' (p.167) overlooked the fragility of this hope and failed to acknowledge that hybridity also implies alienation, a theme popularised in much SF literature today.

Third, there was a lack of engagement with the specifically artificial aspect of the cyborg. Thweatt-Bates makes many connections between cyborgs and other hybrid biological entities (animals, other liminal human beings) but these are all living compatriots who don't span the nature/artifice divide in the same way as the cyborg. Can there also be hybrid compatriots who are entirely artificial? If so, oughtn't the cyborg to be just as compassionate to these purely artificial hybrid siblings?

But, save these few issues, this book is timely. Thweatt-Bates has opened up a significant area of conversation between various contextual theologies and posthumanism and has done some significant work in contributing to this dialogue. The text would be very useful for anyone wanting to be introduced to posthumanism and the many theological and philosophical issues at play in the conversation today.