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 scientistic 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.