

2017

# Beyond Transhumanism: The Dangers of Transhumanist Philosophies on Human and Nonhuman Beings

Benjamin Shane Evans  
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Evans, Benjamin Shane, "Beyond Transhumanism: The Dangers of Transhumanist Philosophies on Human and Nonhuman Beings" (2017). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 15300.  
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/15300>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

**Beyond Transhumanism: The dangers of Transhumanist philosophies on human and nonhuman beings**

by

**Benjamin Shane Evans**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Programs of Study Committee:  
Brianna Burke, Major Professor  
Matthew Sivils  
Charissa Meniffee

The student author and the program of study committee are solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2017

DEDICATION

The work and thoughts put into these words are forever dedicated to Charlie Thomas and Harper Amalie, and those who come next.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>CHAPTER 1. THE STATE OF HUMAN MODIFICATION: TOTALITARIANISM IN THE <i>TRANSHUMAN DECLARATION</i> AND <i>THE TRANSHUMAN WAGER</i></b> .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 2. HUMAN GODS: THE DANGERS OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC IDEOLOGIES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S <i>ORYX AND CRAKE</i> AND PAOLO BACIGALUPI'S <i>THE WINDUP GIRL</i></b> .....	26
<b>CHAPTER 3. IMMORTAL SUICIDE: TRANSHUMANISM AND DEATH IN JOSE SARAMAGO'S <i>DEATH WITH INTERRUPTIONS</i> AND DAVID MITCHELL'S <i>THE BONE CLOCKS</i></b> .....	47
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	68
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	70

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express a monstrous amount of gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Brianna Burke, whose skillful and compassionate advice — and patience — improved this project dramatically. To call her a mentor humbles me and I will continue my work with skills that she nurtured in me. I also thank Dr. Matthew Sivils and Dr. Charissa Meniffee for being on my thesis committee and taking the time to give me feedback on my work, as well as enriching my academic experience at Iowa State University. Finally, I thank my family for their constant and unconditional support, love, and patience; Shane Evans, Mary Evans, Anna Evans, Kaitie Lagan, Greg Lagan, Charlie Lagan, and Harper Lagan — without each one of them and all of them, I would not be here.

## INTRODUCTION

I have read much of the scientific research on climate change. Not all of it, but enough to conclude there are only two pressing questions for literary critics need to consider deeply as we progress further into the century. First, the slightly more optimistic one: what stories should we be telling we are to survive — or do survive — the oncoming ecological catastrophes (apocalypse)? And, secondly, the more pessimistic of the two questions: what stories should we be telling if we (human beings) are about to go extinct? Some may find these two questions reductionist or laughable — or both — but as a species will either survive because of systematic social, cultural, and technological changes and a good measure of luck or go extinct. Before writing this thesis, I was haunted by another question: what do we lose as a species, as cultures, if we survive by augmenting ourselves, and is surviving worth the cost? These questions are the primary concerns of the social and political movement called Transhumanism — a largely philosophical movement (although increasingly political, as I discuss in depth in Chapter 1) that argues we must use genetic modification to become post-human creatures. The Transhumanist believes he or she can become a “better” being who can live forever and defeat the environmental changes coming for us. Yet, the problem worth imagining the consequences of their political philosophy is that hardly anyone, including writers, have fully explored what it might be like to be a trans/posthuman. It is particularly difficult to imagine what it is like to be other than human; its even harder to imagine the identity of a being somehow “better” than human, because humans are necessarily limited in our modes of perception. But the writers who do imagine these characters answer a question necessary for human survival from environmental

catastrophe: what will human beings as a species lose (or gain) through exploring technology in order to survive?

The answer is simple: our humanity. But what, exactly, defines our humanity? In this thesis, I explore the theories of Transhumanity, which claim to have an optimistic answer to these questions: *homo sapiens* will not survive, but only because they will be replaced by a “better,” more technologically-advanced selves. Transhumanists posit an answer to whether or not humanity will survive extinction. But hardly anyone is writing about Transhumanism apart from the founders of the philosophy itself. The few scholars who do critique Transhumanism criticize it in the abstract, picking apart ideas and arguments in *theory*, instead of focusing on the tangible and natural possibilities of the movement, and what impact it can have on the already-existing beings on Earth as well as the beings it seeks to create. It is vitally important to imagine and explore these ramifications, because the future Transhumanists imagine is not that far away; some scholars even argue that the first effectively immortal human has already been born. Though body augmentation and the exponential reliance on computing technology, a future wherein humans voluntarily trade their organic material for metal or plastic in a purely cosmetic sense is not only possible, but *probable*. In many ways, some humans already do this to some extent.

All of this may sound dramatic or overstated, and I hope it is, but the world considering climate change and the global movement towards far-right politics, everything seems to be at stake. Let me provide some context: the ideas of this thesis were formulated and written at the end of the 2016 United States presidential election, and revised at the beginning of U.S. President Donald J. Trump’s presidency. In other words, right now there is a lot of uncertainty

surrounding humanity's survival. Specifically considering the environment, the budget for the Environmental Protection Agency has just been eliminated by a third, so the goal to keep our planet's temperature at less than a 2°C increase is unrealistic; sacred land is being stolen from indigenous Americans to build the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline; water is coming out of the taps in peoples' homes on fire because of the unregulated fracking of natural gas. We are not turning toward sustainability, or green energy, but away from it. And while all this is happening, the United States Committee on Human Gene Editing approved genetic engineering on humans through the use of CRISPR technology, and a chimera, a pig-human hybrid, was created in an American laboratory. As our situation worsens, some people (Trashumanists and many others) believe we will only survive if we modify ourselves to be different organisms. Now more than ever it is important to understand the technology we as a species possess and the responsibility that comes with it. This thesis explores how Transhumanist technological advancements might impact all life on Earth through the visions of the artists of our time.

In writing this thesis, I encountered an issue I didn't expect: I agree with much of what the Transhumanists posit. Their message is incredibly seductive: come with us and we will live forever without disease or pain, through scientific innovation. Who doesn't want to know a world where there is no death and no pain. This world is essentially what Transhumanists promise. They have created an all-encompassing philosophy that promises to explain through its very DNA, all the universe while granting immortality — which is, I argue, precisely why we should not trust it. We have been talking around the problem of pains and suffering for centuries. And as a species, we have not eliminated it because it is likely that life itself is painful and unfair, and people live and die in pain. I disagree with the Transhuman philosophies in that the



entire transhuman project is worth the loss of our humanity, that survival is worth transmuting our species.

Each chapter that follows centers on literature showing the possible effects of Transhumanist philosophies if they are implemented. I focus on contemporary fiction that portrays Transhumanists — humans who believe in Transhumanism — as well as post-/transhumans characters. Limiting the scope of my thesis to contemporary literary works, I aim to explore the potential of new (specifically genetic) technologies, and consider the power of speculative fiction as it impinges both who we are and who or who we might become. In Chapter 1, I analyze the ambiguities of language in the *Transhuman Declaration* (2009), a manifesto written by a group of Transhumanists called Humanity Plus (H+). In this chapter, I show how the language used invites radical, dangerous, and totalitarian ideologies to sprout in Transhumanism, and in turn examine Zoltan Istvan's philosophical novel *The Transhumanist Wager* (2011), which shows a radical Transhumanist building a One World Order to “perfect” the human species. The *Transhumanist Declaration* is the only nonfiction text I analyze in this thesis, and I chose it because it was one of the first, and is certainly the most popular, statement from a collective of Transhumanist thinkers. It changed the movement from a purely academic one to a political one. In Chapter 2, I show Transhumanity's effects on post-/transhuman beings created by the members of the movement, by I analyzing Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) in order to show that Transhumanism may create marvels, but it will also create slaves. This chapter inspects the lives of Atwood's genetically-manipulated Crakers and Bacigalupi's Emiko, an engineered transhuman sex slave, and examines how post-/transhuman beings are deprived of agency in an anthropocentric world. This chapter also focuses

on the issue of the human as an ascendant being and how that view shapes the world we inhabit and will necessarily affect post-/transhuman beings physically and emotionally. In Chapter 3, I look at texts that grant Transhumanism's ultimate wish — immortality — and analyze how immortality, or the lack of death, affects human society through David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* (2014) and Jose Saramago's *Death With Interruptions* (2008). These novels argue that immortality is not the answer to humanity's deeply instantiated problems, and the absence of death will actually create more divisions in society, ultimately leading to violent conflict.

Overall, my goal for this project is to take Transhumanism seriously, not only as a literary critic, but as a living being on this planet. Genetic modification technology already exists and the ability to create and manipulate beings, including human beings, through genetics has already arrived. Transhumanism, politically and culturally, is not on the list of topics for the average dinner conversation, but with this thesis, I want to highlight what could potentially happen to the human species and the beings it creates if and when Transhumanist philosophies become culturally acceptable. Currently, nonhuman beings are devalued in Western society, and in human societies around the globe. If our species creates post-/transhuman life, we will need people who challenge the status of nonhuman beings as lower class beings without rights or agency. We will need humans with sympathy and empathy to care for these beings when they cannot care for themselves. Hopefully, this project asks important questions about how we will conduct ourselves when/if transhumans enter our world.

## CHAPTER 1

HUMAN MODIFICATION IMAGINED: TOTALITARIANISM IN THE *TRANSHUMAN DECLARATION*  
AND *THE TRANSHUMAN WAGER*

Imagine a society with no diversity of thought. People are told what to do and how to act based on ideologies held by those in power. Individuals are forced into professions based on “formulas” and “evidence,” on “probabilities” and “statistics.” In this society, the dreams and ambitions of citizens do not matter because they do not fit into mathematical formulas; their lives are structured around current scientific theory and popular rationality dictated by the state. Those in power decide only science, technology, mathematics, and engineering books are acceptable reading. History is rewritten; religions are increasingly labeled myths and disregarded as unenlightened or irrational (and irrationality is not tolerated because it cannot be explained by science). Mosques, temples, and churches — in fact, all religious symbols that are not hidden — are destroyed by the state. The government becomes an unalterable, unchallengeable, and tyrannical authority. It subjects its citizens to surveillance all of their lives, from the moment they are born until the moment they die, and can ruin their lives professionally or personally, or even kill them, if any of their thoughts conflict with the goals of the state.

Systems like the one described above have become instantly recognizable to those afraid of facism and totalitarianism — and they are the ideologies implicit in Humanity Plus’s *Transhuman Manifesto* and Zoltan Istvan’s *The Transhumanist Wager*. These ideologies no longer seem to have the element of surprise, their novelty mitigated by exposure and time, but right now, political movements in Transhumanism string together similarly dangerous ideologies in their efforts to “perfect” the human. The “singularity,” “natural-born cyborgs,” and “proactionary principle” are provocative ideas and the clarion call to use technologies to alter

the human species makes Transhumanism most daring. But some see what Transhumanists call daring or brave as dangerous and arrogant. Opponents go so far as to claim that this ideology poses a grave threat to humanity. The ideologies peddled by Transhumanists carry an overall seductive message: humanity can live forever, in fact *you* can live forever without aging to disease. Nevertheless, critics counter that after the twentieth century with its gas chambers, chemical and nuclear warfare, and environmental pollution, no responsible person should accept without question the belief that we will find deliverance through science and technology. Although both left and right wings of the political movement incite totalitarian impulses, which I will explain later, key members of the Transhumanist right openly celebrate a totalitarian worldview. In this chapter, I will analyze two different Transhuman political manifestos — one of the earliest, more politically moderate manifestos titled *Transhumanist Declaration*, circulated by the Transhumanist organization Humanity Plus, and Zoltan Istvan's far-right propaganda novel *The Transhumanist Wager*. Through my analysis, I will show that the ambiguities of Humanity Plus's *Transhuman Declaration* invite radical, dangerous, and totalitarian ideologies like those in *The Transhumanist Wager* by trying to "perfect" the human species, which in turn threatens classically liberal egalitarian values like freedom of speech and religion.

Scholars have looked at the political version of Transhumanism as a potential threat to liberal thought. Political scientists Jurgen Habermas and Francis Fukuyama share the concern that Transhumanism will undermine the value of the liberal state and the liberal values that come with it. Habermas asserts that democracy works as long as citizens accept the right of fellow citizens to participate, which is, in turn, based on citizens' assumption that the other men and women voting and serving in office are essentially the same as they are in terms of their mental and physical capacities. Transhumanism challenges that basic assumption. As it stands now,

children as well as nonhuman beings, including transhuman and posthuman beings, are not allowed to have a say in the governance of society, in part because they are thought not to have the same capacity for reasoning. Habermas alleges that if transhumans, and then posthumans, become cognitively or emotionally distinct from humans, commonality and egalitarian values will cease to be upheld and the political structure of democracy will fracture. Habermas also warns that genetically designed children may not be perceived as autonomous actors because they will be governed by the “irreversible intentions of third parties” (63). For Francis Fukuyama, liberal democracy is a crowning achievement. His bold declaration of the “end of history” was meant to signify that we have left the “rough and tumble” period of failed political and economic experiments and have reached the point of fine tuning. However, he warns that all this could change (114). Religious fundamentalism and terrorism represent serious threats to democracies, but Fukuyama is more concerned about human life technologies. Fukuyama asks what will come of society if human nature is reconfigured such that citizens become more docile, more manageable, after which an authoritarian government would be so much more formidable with a population incapable of dissent. Fukuyama warns that Transhumanity will open a door for a return of totalitarianism.

Reasonably, scholars have only recently taken political Transhumanism seriously, although the debate over what constitutes a transhuman — and a human, for that matter — continues from long before. Since the definitions are continually evolving and not yet set, it is useful to understand how I define “Transhumanism.” According to a leading Transhumanist philosopher Max More, the transhuman is less of a being than it is a moniker of a being, meaning that “being” seeks to transition, or continue to transition, between the human and the posthuman,

or the species that comes after humanity either evolves or destroys itself. According to Max More:

[Humans] are Transhuman to the extent that we seek to become posthuman and take action to prepare for a posthuman future. This involves learning about and making use of new technologies that can increase our capacities and life expectancy, questioning common assumptions, and transforming ourselves ready for the future, rising above outmoded human beliefs and behaviors. (More 33)

To More and many contemporary Transhumanist philosophers, the contemporary Transhuman is more of a *process* than a *being* — it is the change between the states of being itself. The transhuman uses technology guided solely by reason to achieve a state of posthumanism. Moreover, to devoted Transhumanists, like Ouroboros for example, the Transhumanist project necessarily argues that humanity *should* try to overcome biological limits. Not only do these Transhumanists celebrate augmentation of what they describe as the fundamental nature of the human, but cite it as a moral imperative: humans not only should be able to use existing and future technologies to change human nature, but *should* seek things like increased intelligence, augmentation, extreme life extension, mood enhancement, and the capabilities that would allow us to abandon Earth and explore the universe.

In short: Transhumanism is a social and political ideology that purports that human bodies need to transform in order to achieve a better quality of life through immortality; much like any totalitarian movement, it seeks to perfect the human both as individuals and as a species. With this working definition in mind, I argue that Humanity Plus's *Transhuman Declaration* invites radically totalitarian ideologies to support Transhumanism, and expedites clearly totalitarian ideologies like those in the *The Transhumanist Wager*, the design of which threatens

classically liberal egalitarian values like diversity of thought and multiculturalism, and if fully adopted and enacted as a political and cultural system, could only result in a world violently dominated by a idealization of reason and logic over other more nuanced cultural systems.

One of the first and most influential Transhuman political manifestos called the *Transhuman Declaration* was drafted in 1998 by twenty-three Transhumanist thinkers, and serves as the platform for Humanity Plus, a Transhumanist organization that lobbies for support from political and corporate institutions. The declaration emphasizes “morphological freedom,” or the ability for individuals to change their biology as they see fit, as well as “solidarity with and concern for the interests of all people around the globe” (54). However, the declaration’s vague nature and general appeal invites interpretation that leads to dangerous political ideologies held by the Transhumanist right, as the declaration bases itself on the idea that truth comes only from a scientific perspective, or at least holds scientific reasoning as the ultimate authority, and in turn delegitimizes individuals that hold ideologies based on spiritual or revealed truth from a supernatural source.

Throughout the *Transhuman Declaration*, the human being is positioned as an imperfect being and the human condition is something to defeat. The declaration creates a system of value based on the technological implementation of scientific procedures as a way to manipulate and modify the human organism. One of the clearest examples to support this is the language the declaration uses in order to describe its goals to manipulate the human, specifically as it refers to the human as a fallen being, as the declaration argues that Transhumanism seeks to implement technologies to “overcoming aging” (54). To start with a more generous reading of this specific goal, in stating that aging is something to be “overcome” is to argue that it is a hurdle, a negative aspect of an assumedly positive whole. Aging, here, is something to be beaten, like a disease,

something to be defeated, or, in a word Western imperialists might be more comfortable with, something to be conquered. By seeking to “overcome,” the manifesto argues that there *is* something to be overcome and that overcoming, by whatever process, is valuable. Logically, then, the opposite outcome of overcoming aging, or in another word dying, is defeat — the loss of a battle against a negative, an evil. Life, or the overcoming of death, is valued, and implicitly there is something sinister about aging, and, perhaps, about those who age.

The *Transhuman Declaration* doesn’t just argue for “overcoming” physical attributes of the human condition, but also seeks to manipulate cognition. The language the declaration uses also implies that current human mental capacities are imperfect and need fixing, or improving. Citing humanity’s potential to overcome “cognitive shortcomings” the declaration betrays a dim portrait of the human species (54). By using “shortcomings” to describe human cognition, the authors of the manifesto endorse the idea that the human organism is defective, that the species somehow is deficient to an absolute ideal of cognition — in turn implicitly claiming that there is an ideal to achieve. The bleak picture painted in the species shortcomings — a cognitive fault, flaw, weakness — leads to the conclusion that the human being is imperfect. Again, the implicit idea here is that human cognition has “shortcomings,” prompting the question: short of what? The manifesto, in pointing out the “shortcomings” of the human, assumes it is even possible for humans to fall short of a created and implied ideal. That sinister assumption, that the ideal exists, and we are not it, inevitably leads to division.

Not only does the declaration betray a bleak view of the human condition, it also betrays a self-hating, or at best indifferent, view towards humanity’s physical habitat. The declaration paints Earth as an imperfect place, and asserts a need to unshackle the Transhuman and posthuman from its “confinement to planet Earth” (54). To the Transhumanist, Earth is a place of



“confinement,” a restriction, a place of repression and incarceration. Interned and restricted from achieving “full” potential by the Earth, the Transhumanist in this manifesto sees Earth as a jail — a place where humanity is detained until the species achieves an “idyllic” form, wherein it can “heroically” break free from its confinement and, presumably, spread to other planets.

Positioning the Earth in this way betrays indifference to the planet that birthed humans from single-celled organisms and allowed for the growth of our species (despite that same species’ indifference).

All of these aspects of the human species — its imperfect physical capacities, its imperfect mental capacities, its imperfect habitat — illustrate the underlying Transhuman need to perfect the humanity. Transhumanism proposes in this declaration, and implicitly argues, that the human organism needs to be perfect and can only be perfected through scientific means. The declaration states that humanity’s “potential is still mostly unrealized” — but what constitutes “perfection” and who decides (54)? The implicit argument here is that humanity, or any being, can reach a place where there is no more potential, where a being is perfected, and implies that any being who falls short of that specific and narrow ideal is less worthy of respect and perhaps even rights. By saying that the potential is “still” unrealized, the manifesto suggests there will be a time when this fantasy potential is realized and that state of potential achieved. But these Transhumanists are fellow humans, fellow mammals, like all others in the human species, made of the same arrant and torpid and fallible materials, yet they claim they *know* what should be valued in a society, and that scientific truth is one of those things. According to their own argument, Transhumanists take results of themselves are fallible and fall short of human “potential,” and still they assume the ability to use results of scientific studies to create a “better” life.

Their fundamental idea is to create a super human, ascendant because of its assumed singular ability to obtain knowledge through reason. In this declaration, the human is a sick being — it is incomplete and needs to be fixed. The only way to fix the human is through technological advancements made through scientific reasoning, primarily through genetic modification and cybernetics. The declaration conflates nature with disease, assuming that the well being of humanity should be valued above all, and that aging or death are inherently negative. Yet aging is natural, and death is not necessarily negative, since both serve social and biological functions not only for humanity, but for the entire ecosystem surrounding the human species. In this, the declaration insists that moral truth can be measured by the well-being of the human species — furthered by it “realizing” its potential — and that well-being is necessarily good. Also, the declaration assumes that logical reasoning is solely a human attribute. Other nonhuman species then provide no value to the Transhumanist unless they can reason like a human to improve the human, which is to say obtain knowledge through scientific reasoning.

The *Transhumanist Declaration* further invites misinterpretation by stating that its priorities revolve around reducing human extinction above all other goals. The declaration again assumes that prolonging the human species is a positive, or a moral necessity, despite planetary overpopulation. After stating that scientific reasoning is the only method through which Transhumanists can achieve their goals, the declaration then states that the “preservation of life and health, the alleviation of grave suffering and the improvement of human foresight and wisdom, be pursued as urgent priorities and generously funded,” and once that is achieved, the trans-/posthuman beings will steward “the well-being of all sentience, including humans, non-human animals, and any future artificial intellects, modified life forms, or other intelligences to which technological and scientific advance may give rise” (54). The priorities of the declaration

are clear: promote the well-being of the trans-/posthuman over the other beings and guide the evolution of humans, as well as nonhumans, through scientific reasoning. The declaration opens itself up to vile interpretation, specifically that these technologies might lead to the creation of a trans-/posthuman being that does not care about other human or nonhumans at all. Ironically, the very speciesism in Transhuman philosophy may inadvertently erode the human species by creating a posthuman who sees itself as a more reasonable alternative to the beastly human. In believing itself “superior,” the posthuman would merely be repeating humanity’s long history of oppressing other human populations based on their appeared “inability” to reason. Thus, the *Transhuman Declaration* implies that those who are unable or choose not to operate by rational systems will be treated as second-class citizens and be ruled by those who use solely logical and scientific systems to construct their reality.

The *Transhuman Declaration* further argues that this “perfecting” of the human species through technological and scientific means should be accomplished through “a social order where responsible decisions can be implemented” (54). If the *Transhumanist Declaration* stopped at a mere glorification of science and the scientific method in pushing humanity towards a certain destiny, it would barely be worth consideration, as this line of thinking has been utilized in some form for some time. But the manifesto does not stop at stating a private philosophy, instead including a stated political goal to bring this philosophy into action within the public sphere. At the same time, the manifesto calls for responsible decisions, based solely on scientific enquiry, making value judgments on human society at large. If implemented in the way some Transhumanists envision, for example how Istvan imagines it in *The Transhuman Wager*, this philosophy can only lead to division through the total intolerance of the “irrational,” or what they perceive as irrational behavior. A total implementation of this Transhumanist philosophy could

create a society that only tolerates the “irrational” as long as they are stripped of power, culturally or militarily, which means subjugation, or the indifference to the well-being of a perceived “irrational” individuals. This political stance will come at the expense of other freedoms, different, less valued freedoms, such as the freedom to be irrational, since the construction of reality from only a scientific perspective, or at least scientific thought as the ultimate authority over truth, does not include a place for religion, spirituality, or abstract moral values. In this, the declaration gives priority not to truth, but to the implementation of technologies in human society based on what humans know scientifically at this moment in time. It assumes that what can be implanted, will be implemented, to a large extent at least, and that all technologies deemed to increase the well-being of sentients should be implemented. Instead of a search for the truths that can only be found through inquiry into reality outside the subjective experience, it is a search for truths that can increase the human potential for...what? The problem here is the assumption that well-being of a sentient creature is moral, is good, and that well-being can be understood solely through scientific inquiry. This would necessarily entail creating a blueprint for the human experience that defines what well-being as what being sentient *means* and looks like.

Because Transhumanism stresses the importance of systematic social or political implementation of its philosophies, the declaration opens the door to totalitarian philosophies based on Transhumanist principles. In order to be a part of the totalitarian mind-set, it is not necessary to wear a uniform or carry a club or a whip. In the early history of mankind, the totalitarian principle was the regnant one. The state religion supplied a complete and “total” answer to all questions, from one’s position in the social hierarchy to the rules governing diet and sex. Slave or not, some humans were property, and the clerisy reinforced of absolutism. George

Orwell's most imaginative projection of the totalitarian idea — the offense of “thoughtcrime” — was commonplace, at least according to those who wanted to police thoughts. That totalitarian principle is alive and well in the *Transhuman Declaration*, because it positions human potential as totally enslaved to scientific thought. But the same mind-set can easily be seen in radical interpretations of political Transhumanism, and no less so than in one of the more brutal and dangerous interpretations, which comes in the form of an autobiographical, philosophical, and propagandistic novel by the leader of the United States's National Transhumanist Party Zoltan Istvan.

Istvan's book, *The Transhuman Wager*, calls for open revolt against democratic institutions that merely criticize developments in Transhumanist technologies. The novel follows a political Transhumanist, Jethro Knight, whose ultimate goal in life is to achieve immortality. The cardboard narrative follows Knight as he develops a radical, anti-social, Transhumanist philosophy, then creates a Transhumanist political party in the United States, as well as a global Transhumanist party, and finally takes over the world through violent force. The novel's protagonist becomes Earth's first global dictator and spreads Transhumanist philosophy and technology through genocide and “humanicide,” and, in the end, is applauded for it. At first, the novel seems like just that — a fictional, if self-indulgent, speculation of the rise of a violent Transhuman utopia; a mix between Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. However, the author betrays the motivation of the book in his afterword, which states that the book “is the result of two decades of thought and inquiry into Transhumanism and the quest of scientific immortality” that hopes “to change people's ideas of what a human being is and what it can become” (298). For Istvan, the philosophy in this book is a guide for radical Transhumanists seeking immortality at the expense of others. The book's protagonist Jethro Knights, in his

radical fundamentalism, embodies the political right wing of Transhumanism and its struggle to eradicate superstitious ideologies to unite the world under the flag of rationality and reason.

Through *Knights*, Istvan writes that the current Transhumanism movement is a “worn old club of fools, pretenders, and religiously biased speculators” to be rejected and dehumanized (34). In order to continue building a One World Order, which the book’s protagonist regards as a potential utopia, *Knights* violently commits mass murder. The war that Transhumanists face is specifically seen in *Knights*’ murder of Reverend Belinas, the leader of a global religion, made up of a majority of the Earth’s population, which argues against Transhumanist policies.

Istvan’s *Knights* views the human species as weak and worthless, only useful if it is a means to a different end. The narrator states that “most humans are cowardly idiots” who won’t follow Transhumanism because “because they feel threatened and don’t understand” (34). The narrator also assumes that “every man and woman...wants to be improved and live longer, healthier lives,” not “remain animals,” and that his Transhumanist “logic [is] inescapable” (28). The philosophy in the book assumes first that any rational human wants to be “improved,” as if humans first exist in a fallen state, or in a state that *needs* improvement, much like the ideas seen in the *Transhuman Declaration*. However, if humans do not think this, then they do not have the mental capacity to understand why their humanity needs improving, or they feel threatened by the process and are cowardly, unworthy of the lives they have. The philosophy also intentionally differentiates between animals and transhumans, implying that to be an animal is to somehow be less than or inferior to a potential Transhuman future. This level of speciesism and classism makes the philosophy dangerous, as it promotes the idea that the Transhuman, the human seeking to be posthuman, is intellectually superior to not just nonhuman animals, but also to other humans.

The philosophy in Istvan's novel also decries the larger society that provides for humans deemed inferior to the fundamentalist Transhuman. The novel's philosophy sees contemporary civilization as a force that suffocates the rational in favor of an "inferior" way of living. In the narration, the book states that contemporary "culture, religion, democracy, social ethics, and legal systems [are] just blinding forms of glorified masochistic conduct" to "ensure subordination of individual ambitions to society's collective control — to promote the greater good of humanity at the expense of the most singularly talented" (80). Indeed, the novel insists that "all levels of society must be subject to the sanctity of the individual," specifically the sanctity of the most singularly talented individuals (69). Knights, the fundamental Transhumanist, sees contemporary civilization as a barrier to a scientific utopia based solely on reason. In this philosophy, culture is useless, religion is dogmatic, and democracy gives power to the intellectually inferior. Istvan argues there is actually no social contract the fundamental Transhumanist unless power can be gained from another person, rendering social ethics obsolete, while legal systems are corrupt because they are based on human error. In this book, all of the systems which human civilization has instituted under the banners of justice, fairness, and equality, chain the intellectually superior to their idiot inferiors. The fundamental Transhumanist is only "interested in immortality" and "how to reach it," and social and governmental institutions are anti-progress simply because they hold back scientific research based on ethical complications. In the fundamental Transhumanist philosophy, "life is essentially a choice between pursuing personal godhood or dust" (35). And even more grotesque, the philosophy in the book reduces every human to essentially the same power hungry impulses, as it states, "give every sane and rational person a big red button to push to achieve instantaneous omnipotence, and all of them would quickly jam their fingers down on it" (35).

In the novel, Istvan boils down Knights' philosophy and names it TEF, or Teleological Egocentric Functionalism. This philosophy is what the Transhumanist dictator brings to his conquered lands, forcing all the Earth's peoples to follow it. It is teleological "because it is every advanced individual's inherent design and desired destiny to evolve"; it is egocentric "because it is based on each [human's] selfish individual desires, which are of the foremost importance"; and it is functional "because it [is] only...rational and consequential" (84). The philosophy can be summed up in three laws, which are the opening sentences of the book: the first, that "a Transhumanist must safeguard one's own existence above all else"; the second, that "a Transhumanist must strive to achieve omnipotence as expediently as possible — so long as one's actions do not conflict with the First Law"; and finally, the third, that "a Transhumanist must safeguard value in the universe — so long as one's actions do not conflict with the First and Second Laws" (4). The book offers Teleological Egocentric Functionalism as a quintessential guide for all Transhumanists, although it glorifies anti-social behaviors and sociopathy. The underlying assumption is that all humans are essentially selfish creatures, bent on maintaining their own self interest above all — which is morally a good thing. The philosophy embedded in TEF assumes not only what defines a morally good human being, but how to define a human being: as selfish, incomplete, and too emotional. According to TEF, a moral human being is one that is selfish, and acts on those selfish desires in a rational and consequential way. And, again, the human who follows TEF to become Transhuman claims his superior place among the selfless, social, emotional human beings.

But TEF is just a means to an end for Istvan and potentially other Transhumanists. The novel states that the goal of any Transhumanist should be to become an "elite Transhuman champion" called the omnipotender: "the ideal and zenith of life extension and human



enhancement populace” who “uses TEF to its full capacity, its cold precision-like morality determined solely by its functionality,” an “unyielding individual whose central aim is to contend for as much power and advancement as he could achieve, and whose immediate goal is to transcend his human biological limitations in order to reach a permanent sentience” (33). To Istvan, the ultimate goal is that of an individual, self-sustaining entity, bent on pursuing as much power as possible in life. While achieving ultimate power, the omnipotender will achieve immortality, as well as a “universal dictatorship...over everything and everyone” (80). It is easy to see the essential assumption for the fundamental Transhumanist is that every human being, in fact every living thing, eventually arrives at the same epiphany that everything and everyone is selfish, and only values power. The omnipotender itself is an admission that this philosophy’s creator, deep down inside, thinks that it is in the fabric of humankind to conquer and enslave everything around it — and that is not only morally acceptable, but morally laudable. The omnipotender itself requires hierarchy, as there can only be one, and therefore reinforces the idea that there should be divisions in society — speciesism, classism, sexism, elitism, or otherwise — that we are each born unequal, and that inequality should be leveraged for the benefit of the privileged.

In the novel, on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum in this conflict from Jethro Knight, is Reverend Belinas, a radical leader of an evangelical sect of Christianity called the Redeem Church, who violently opposes all Transhuman philosophies and their technological applications. Belinas is the physical embodiment of what Knight’s Transhumanist philosophies struggle against: a religious leader dealing in superstition in order to gain power and status over the irrational. The narrator continually alludes to Belinas’s “quasi-evangelical Christian practices and loud anti-Transhumanist agenda,” the preacher’s personal “unequivocal faith in God, his

unblemished piety, and his intense devotion to the world's poor," as well as his church's "strong governmental ties and massive financial resources" (22). Belinas is a thinly veiled allegory for the world's most powerful religious leaders: an unapologetic figure of Judeo-Christian persuasion, whose conservative values at once permeate the halls of public power and attract the privately wealthy.

But it is not Belinas' outward devotion to the poor, or even his anti-Transhumanist philosophies that make him dangerous to Jethro Knights and his followers. The danger in the novel to the Transhuman comrades lies in the power Belinas possesses over what the Transhumanists see as a largely uneducated, fearful, and superstitious populous in the United States and around the world. One of the best summations of Belinas' power appears as he arrives at a national Transhumanism Forum, where thousands of people protest Transhumanist government policies. As he walks through

the crowd he saw a disfigured paraplegic man in a wheelchair,  
holding a sign: Faith in God — Not in Transhuman Science. Belinas stopped,  
knelt on one knee, and prayed with him, tightly clasping the man's hands. The  
crowd around them went silent for thirty seconds, until they finished. (22)

In two sentences, Belinas is summed up: a religious leader publicly lowering himself in order to appease the less fortunate who carry the dogmatic message of his church by calling on supernatural forces to protect or serve him. To a Transhumanist, specifically in this book, the moral outrage is palpable: here is a man, publicly manipulating a physically disabled person to act against his own self interest (Transhumanism certainly would come up with a technology or procedure to cure the paraplegic) in order to further a superstition or belief. Belinas, aware of the crowd, makes a concerted effort to be seen tightly clasping the hands of a supporter whose

message encapsulates the fundamental clash between reason and faith: religion demands faith, while science demands the exact opposite, a critical and skeptical approach to reality.

The power Belinas possesses is not just on an individual level or based on the ability to affirm the beliefs that he shares. Istvan gives his religious leader an almost supernatural power to quiet and manipulate large groups of people. As Reverend Belinas walks through crowds, they divide, “like a saint parting a waterway”; when groups of violently intentioned protestors catch sight of the religious leader, they erupt in “cheers and whistles”; and after seeing the leader, the people in these groups cry and get down on their “knees, casting prayers and wishes his way” (21). Belinas, like many religious leaders in contemporary society, holds an unnerving amount of power over the common man. He does not extract this power through physical coercion or illegal methods, but instead relies on the superstition and irrationality of others to grant him power. Again, the power Belinas possesses is not in his opposition to Transhumanist philosophies, but in his ability to sway mass amounts of people into service to a supernatural being and into accepting Belinas as the voice of that supernatural leader on Earth. Belinas’ power, in effect, lies with the majority voting population of the United States, who in the novel decry Transhumanist policies in their government. Therefore, the danger for Knights and Transhumanism is not a single leader who believes in superstition and irrationality, but instead the entire human population able to make their own decisions, or a free and diverse majority who are able to elect their leaders. The danger to Transhumanism, in short, is democracy and liberalism’s egalitarian principles of tolerance and diversity.

Only after Knights eliminates democratic and liberal restrictions on his radical Transhumanist philosophies, through the creation of a sovereign nation based fundamentally on Transhuman principles, is Knights able to kill Reverend Belinas and eliminate superstitious

ideologies from the Earth. The most efficient way Knights challenges Reverend Belinas' superstitious masses — the democratic majority that rejects Knights' ideologies — is through military force, specifically through the building of ten individual robotic systems, each “under strict control of its personal avatar: a human engineer sitting behind a computer” as well as “champion gamers with years of competitive experience in professional video game tournaments” (210). The ten systems, each with a kitsch name — Weaponbot, Medibot, Firebot, Bombbot, Crashbot, Buildbot, Strongbot, Polibot, Intelibot, and Soliderbot — represent a part of a vast “military development for the protection and expansion of” the Transhuman utopia, that will herald the “future of the Transhuman Revolution” (210, 252). The development and consequent creation of these military systems point to specific ideology wrapped in the Transhumanist philosophy: the ideological colonization and violent overthrow of political systems not based on the cult of the Transhuman — democratic or otherwise. Although convinced of the truth of his Transhuman philosophies, Knights expects war, or even further seeks to create it, as it would give them an opportunity to cull the superstitious masses and convert the world under one order. In the novel, this is not just a cultural war, but a violent, potentially species-threatening conflict between a technologically manipulated elite and the superstitious and irrational populace. Istvan imagines a Transhumanist philosophy that people are willing to kill over, and arguably more dangerously, willing to die for.

Because the Transhumanists and the religious in the book are both willing to die for their beliefs, a violent conflict between them is inevitable and culminates in a death match between the two champions for the causes: Reverend Belinas and Jethro Knights. In the killing of the evangelical leader by Transhuman-built, artificially intelligent, military technology, Istvan champions an authoritarian leader whose dogma is that of techno-scientific domination. As

Knights chokes Belinas to death with a pair of handcuffs after one of Transhumania's military robots breaks into the Reverend's compounds, Knights makes Belinas look into the robot's eye as the preacher dies, and whispers to him, "This is your God. And it's here for me to command" (252). Not satisfied with a mere physical domination of his victim, Knights violently forces his ideology onto Belinas, appropriating the Christian's deity and transferring the power to his Transhuman-built and operated machine. In this, Transhumanism dictates to the superstitious what they will worship and what they will value: a radical, military conception of the future based on scientific reality and technological advancement. Because this technology is Transhuman and based on rational reasoning, it is under the control of the Transhuman and the logical. In this, the future is Transhuman, and those who will not accept that will die by the hands of the Transhumanists through their advanced technology.

Although Istvan's book is a radical Transhuman fantasy, in the last year Transhuman Political Parties have formed en masse around the world, each promoting the agenda set forth in the *Transhuman Declaration* analyzed earlier to pave the way for transhuman technological enhancement to take place. The two texts I examine here were created with the goal to morph the human species into something else through technological "enhancements" even though *The Transhuman Wager* espouses it differently and to more radical ends than the *Transhuman Declaration*. Political Transhumanism, radical or not, is dangerous because it relies on creating divisions in society in order to reimagine and reconstruct the human species. We, as a human species, are nowhere near able to maintain equality among ourselves, let alone open the door to trans- and posthuman beings, which will lead to more inequality. Realizing this, we as a species need to decide that fully implementing liberal egalitarian values is needed to create a sustainable future. The anthropocentric ideologies enslave people with less resources in favor of those with

more resources; they make people part of a simple equation of utility, not of value. By looking at Humanity Plus's *Transhumanist Declaration* and Zoltan Istvan's propaganda novel *The Transhumanist Wager*, the dangers inherent in transhumanist political philosophies become clear: they root themselves deeply in totalitarian ideologies that glorify Western Enlightenment values, specifically a radical glorification of the reason, science, and the individual self.

## CHAPTER 2

HUMAN GODS: THE DANGERS OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC IDEOLOGIES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE* AND PAOLO BACIGALUPI'S *THE WINDUP GIRL*

Imagine a world where racism, sexism, classism, and speciesism run rampant. People all around are categorized based on gender or skin color or species, and only given rights based on how what physical attributes they had or their financial worth. Imagine international corporations create transhuman and posthuman beings in laboratories, and sell them across the globe as sex slaves or simply slaves. These same corporations manipulate the genetics of nonhuman beings specifically to *be* different, to *be* a subjugated class. Now imagine not being a human in that world. Imagine every part of that being's physicality was designed to betray their agency. Imagine they were created in subjugation, and every part of them, from their genetic code to their subjective experience, was designed to satisfy the appetites of an "ascendant" class. They were created different, and because they were created different, they are a commodity, a thing, a slave: a being without rights.

That is the world of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*. The narratives exist in two distinct landscapes where nonhuman beings are manufactured and manipulated to satisfy humanity's appetites. Nonhuman beings are created to be slaves, because the human beings in these imagined worlds believe they are superior to other beings. But it is not just the fictional world Atwood and Bacigalupi's narratives inhabit; we also live in that world. Right now, we live in a world where speciesism, classism, racism, and sexism run rampant. Bits of nonhuman beings can be found on dinner plates at restaurants and in stores on racks. These nonhuman beings are genetically manipulated and slaughtered by the hundreds of billions to satisfy humanity's appetites for food and clothes — simply because humanity sees

itself as superior and ascendant to these nonhuman beings. We live in a society built on the backs of human and nonhuman slaves, and racism, sexism, classism, and speciesism run rampant.

Although we may recognize the inequality in our society, transhumanism and scientific advances promise to create more nonhuman beings in the form of transhumans and posthumans. Although these “advances” prod another ideological struggle to define what constitutes a human being — and what should constitute a human being — the cultural climate that leads to these posthuman creations bases itself on the same assumptions that justify humanity’s daily Holocaust of current nonhuman beings: that the human being reins supreme over the beasts of the Earth, and therefore retains the right to dominate, violate, and murder into extinction nonhuman beings. And this is the assumption that both Atwood and Bacigalupi argue needs to end.

To combat a future in which humanity continues to subjugate nonhuman beings, including possible posthuman beings, we must combat the idea of the human being as an ascendant creature. One way to do that is look to literature to see what effects a future that still holds the human as superior will have on nonhuman beings, including posthumans — or, if Transhumanists have their way, *when* we create them. Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* as well as Paulo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* imagine two such futures. By analyzing these novels’ respective treatment of posthumans, I will show they deconstruct the contemporary ideologies glorifying the human and argue that the persistence of that glorification destroys the chance for functional equality between human and created, or already existing, nonhuman beings.

Both Margaret Atwood’s and Paulo Bacigalupi’s novels deal with the impact of anthropocentric ideologies in a world where humans maintain their supremacist attitudes towards nonhuman beings, in turn arguing that contemporary ideologies of species dominance do not,



and cannot, work in a world inhabited by humans and post-/transhumans. *Oryx and Crake* and *The Windup Girl* show shared, but unequal, worlds where humans and nonhumans interact with each other in a society, but where human domination continues because humans maintain their glorified status. This arrogant status leads to and justifies humanity's all-too-familiar enslavement and exploitation of "inferior" beings, which in turn works against the survival of both. The two novels deconstruct the contemporary humanist and Abrahamic religions' shared glorification of the human and argue that the persistence of that glorification destroys the chance for an egalitarian society wherein discrimination in favor of one species over another does not exist. The novels also complicate the dogmatic assumption that the human is an exceptional being, and in turn recognize the need to categorize this assumption as dangerous to all life on planet Earth.

Before I analyze the novels' deconstruction of the contemporary glorification of the human being, it is useful to understand how our species became ascendant in Western culture, in brief. The human as a transcendent being is a central theme in the origins of religious ideologies that dominate Western culture, specifically those of the Abrahamic tradition.<sup>1</sup> In his article on how Christianity treats Earth and its inhabitants, "Environmental Stewardship," Barrett Duke cites the Judeo-Christian origin stories to explain modern explanations of environmental concerns. Duke states that religious groups understand that the "earth is the Lord's," but the "Lord" gives the Earth to humans, focusing on the idea that humans are the transcendent species chosen by God to dominate the other beings on Earth (Duke 22). Followers cite evidence for this claim in Genesis 2:15, using it as the core Biblical verse to ground their anthropocentric view on,

---

<sup>1</sup> The dominating ideologies of Western colonial powers come to dominate global ideologies through rapid and violent conversion due to political and religious colonization then de- and neocolonization. This all leads to the simple conclusion that Westerners, largely Christian, impose their ideologies on the world. For further understanding of the depth of this issue see *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P. Huntington as well as *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* by Luis Rivera.

as it states “the Lord God took the man and put into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it” (Gen 2:15).<sup>2</sup> Duke explains the believer interprets this verse to mean God chose humans to guard the Earth, protect its resources, and to preserve them for the benefit of humankind (22). This verse, however, is not the only place where anthropocentrism guides the environmental ideology of believers in the Abrahamic religions. The book of Psalms states “the earth” was “given to the sons of men” (Ps 115:16). The flood of Noah allows other evidence to humanity’s power over nonhuman beings, as God proclaimed that “He gave all living creatures into human hands” (Gen 9:2-3). In the dominating Western view, humans *own* nonhumans by divine decree — God created humans to dominate, to manage, to shepherd as property their nonhuman counterparts.

Enlightenment attitudes continued the same ideological thread in a new form: the human is ascendant because of its assumed singular ability to obtain knowledge through reason. This anthropocentrism is not only a cornerstone of religious ideologies, but also a cornerstone in Enlightenment rationalization of the human as the only being able to obtain knowledge. Enlightenment philosopher Rene’ Descartes crystalizes this idea, as he argued that reasoning is the singular attribute that “makes us men and distinguishes us from the beasts” (Descartes 2). Here, the implication is clear: beasts are beastly, unable to reason and therefore inferior to the logical, civilized human being. The ascendant, reasonable human is separate from the lower nonhuman. Descartes assumes nonhumans cannot reason, cannot possess agency, and cannot act in the same way humans can, but instead are simply animal and can be treated as objects to control, therefore lacking the rights that humans possess.

---

<sup>2</sup> *King James* version of the Bible here (and in subsequent citations).

The works of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan begin to chip away at the idea that human reason, and therefore the human being, is superior to nonhuman animals, as Neil Badminton points out in *Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism*.

Philosophers began to deconstruct the human condition, and in turn dismantled of the human being's ascendant status. Marx asserts that "[social] life...determines consciousness;" Freud's psychoanalysis leads to the conclusion that consciousness is uncontrollable; modern thinkers began challenging the Enlightenment idea that the human being was anything other than an animal, in turn dismantling the idea that the human being ascended at all (Badminton 3).

The shift away from anthropocentric thought, and in turn anthropocentric narratives, began with Posthumanism and posthuman philosophies of identity beginning in the late 1960s. Attacks on the human being's place as a "special" or "chosen" species included Nietzsche's continuous questioning into the authenticity of the Western God and through his eventual adoption of Nihilism, as well as through Martin Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, which critiqued humanism's view of existence as described by Emmanuel Levinas's *Humanism of the Other*. In Heidegger's view, existence meant "ecstatic involvement in the world," not an authoritative "self-consciousness raised to its limit" (Levinas xix). This view of existence challenged the humanist view held by those like Jean-Paul Sartre who states that nonhuman existence is "no more than the ecstatic but empty separation of consciousness from itself," thus drawing a convenient line between species once again (Levinas xix). Posthumanists such as Heidegger put all beings in existence on the same level, as the philosopher says, "what matters in the determination of the humanity of man as existence is not that man is the essential, but that Being is the essential" (Levinas xix). This rejection of the human as central and ascendant led to the idea that the nonhuman, or the eventual posthuman, exists as a creature with agency and

individual identity, challenging the thought that humans would always be superior to nonhumans based on their consciousness and reasoning abilities.

To understand exactly how I will be dealing with posthumanism, I must first define what I mean by posthumanism. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles defines posthumanism through four key points articulating that “the posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (3). She argues that posthuman discussion and action will not only supersede but also destroy the concept of the “natural” self (3). Hayles opposes the view that the days of humans are numbered, as she argues that the human body has a “physical structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share” (283). Instead, she argues that,

[Posthumanism] signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. (286)

Instead, what appears to be the threat to humanity’s anthropocentric worldview is not the posthuman, but instead the transhuman. I discuss Transhumanism at length in my first chapter; it is the social and political ideology that purports that human bodies need to transform in order to achieve a better quality of life through immortality. In Max More’s *The Transhumanist Reader*, Nick Bolstrom states that an anthropocentric world should want to become transhuman as its members naturally possess a desire to enhance their capacity to stay alive, arguing that he suspects “the majority of humankind already has such a desire implicitly” (More 33). Yet if humans become transhuman, and transhumans become posthuman, the specific humans who

choose to transition would import their specist values to a world where the human becomes less and less important. One of the serious flaws in Transhumanist thought is the conflation of anthropocentric and specist values with the biotechnological enhancement of any species, let alone human.

So, too, the idea that humans are superior to nonhuman beings lies deep within our culture. From Judeo-Christian religious ideologies that give human beings dominion over nonhuman beings, to Western Enlightenment philosophy that distinguishes human from “beast” based on reason, to postmodern philosophy that prizes consciousness—the idea that humans are better or uniquely superior is deep within our cultural definition of what it means to be human. For centuries, the human species has reinforced the idea that it is “special” and has justified its behavior towards and treatment of other beings through this idea. The difficulty inherent in shifting humanity’s view of itself, and therefore its view of how it treats other species, lies in how deep this idea is in our collective consciousness and cultural behaviors. Ridding our species of anthropocentric views is incredibly difficult because we are talking about completely redefining what it means to be human as a *species*. And this is important because we live on the cusp of an age where we cannot allow the idea that humans are superior to survive or humanity as a species may not. How we deal with this problem will determine whether or not we, and many nonhuman beings on this planet, continue to exist into the future.

Both Atwood and Bacigalupi explore the potential problems that may arise when humans import anthropocentric ideologies into a world where humans and post-/transhumans co-mingle. Both novels illustrate the problems and dangers in incorporating anthropocentric, humanist values into a society with posthumans, as it renders the nonhumans as slaves, lesser beings created to serve their human masters. The deconstruction of the idea that the human is an exalted,

glorified being is shown in Atwood and Bacigalupi's novels through their portrayal of posthuman subjects as the Other, whose existence prove that anthropocentric ideologies make equality among human and nonhuman beings impossible.

In *The Windup Girl*, Bacigalupi creates a world where white, male, powerful, Midwestern "generippers" are responsible for the end of the world in a series of cascading "calorie plagues." Within this world, we see two competing religious factions: proselytizing Judeo-Christian "Grahamites" who preach biological purity, and Buddhists who stress humanity's oneness with the natural world, both fighting over ideological superiority and dominion over natural resources in Thailand, where the narrative takes place. The entire novel revolves around a posthuman "fetish" object, Emiko, who both religious factions reject because her biological makeup does not fit with their specist ideologies; Grahamites hate Emiko because she isn't biologically pure, while Buddhists hate her because they don't recognize her as a part of the natural order. The conflict between the two religious factions in Bangkok ends when an apocalyptic flood destroys the city's resources and most of the people — except Emiko. With the help of an eccentric generipper named Gibbons, Emiko escapes the shackles of human domination.

One of the most dangerous anthropocentric ideologies to Emiko in *The Windup Girl* manifests in an adaptation of contemporary Christianity, wherein the Western Grahamites promote their environmental messiahs, Noah and Saint Francis of Assisi. The Grahamites preach biblical scriptures that include anti-genetic modification "Niche Teachings," which values genetic purity and condemns beings born from gene-ripping. The teachings say food should "come from its place of origin, and stay there" arguing that society "went down that path once, and it brought [the people] to ruin" (Bacigalupi 93). Grahamites preach on the streets of Bangkok out of their "Holy Bible and its stories of salvation," which is an adaptation of the contemporary

Christian bible, with the stories of “Noah Bodhisattva, who saved all the animals and trees and flowers on his great bamboo raft” (169). For the Grahamites, the ideology of human exceptionalism is alive, as all the “pure” plants and animals are saved by a man with special authority from a supernatural being. The story speaks to the centrality of human agency in the novel; this revised alternative of the flood narrative still includes Noah, a man chosen to rescue both plants and animals from the evils of genetic manipulation.

*The Windup Girl* also offers ideologies that are not anthropocentric, yet still recognize transhumans and posthumans as a lower class. In Thailand, Buddhists pray to a “biodiversity martyr” called Phra Seub, whose face dons religious talismans that protect commoners against the agricultural plagues of the calorie companies (82). The Buddhists also revere King Rama XII, who built the physical salvation of Thailand: the system of pumps and walls that keep the sea at bay and Bangkok above water (82). The Buddhists and Grahamites exist in the same space, but their differing views on the exceptional nature of humanity keeps them ideologically at odds, in a constant state of tribalist conflict. The ideological conflict where one side glorifies humans and the other includes humans and nonhumans, can best be illustrated by the treatment of Bangkok’s sacred bo trees. The trees are thought sacred by those rooted in the idea that man is just a part of a larger existence and not the center of it; but the trees are nearly wiped out by Western-dominated calorie companies who created plagues that target fig trees. Bangkok native Jaidee cries over the thought that his great-grandchildren will perhaps not “even know that bo trees existed...that there were many trees, and that they were of many types...Not just a Gates teak, and a gene ripped PurCal banana” (168). The human-centered ideology that glorifies human needs over the needs of all existing creates decimates the Bangkok Buddhists’ ideology as Western cultures have historically. Western calorie companies colonize Thailand’s economy, and

with it, Western values imported from Grahamites and calorie men infect Thailand's population. Like the plagues the companies created to destroy the sacred bo trees, the Westerners bring with them an ideological plague that emphasizes the dominance and superiority of the human over the natural world.

The Western ideological plague does not just affect trees, but conscious beings as well, seen in the subjugation of sex-slave posthuman Emiko. Her existence is entangled in a complex web of cultural significations. The so-called "windup girl's" treatment by the human-centered culture around her sheds light on the dangers of a culture that glorifies humans over all beings. In Thailand, the nonhuman being is categorized as "genetically transgressive," an invasive species subject to immediate "mulching" if captured by the Thai environmental ministry (129). To the average Thai, she is merely "an illegal piece of genetic trash," and yet "with stamps and a passport" she becomes an "exquisite valued object" because of the fetishized capitalistic culture (129, 106). Because of the anthropocentric worldview in the novel — a shadow of the one we currently exist in — Emiko is valued because she can be utilized, she can be sold and bought, traded and marketed by humans for humans, simply because humans want her. She is nonhuman: an animal, a commodity, a thing denied agency, consciousness, or feelings, and thus rights.

These anthropocentric attitudes towards Emiko are seen throughout the other religious ideologies in Thailand as well. To Grahamites, Emiko is a devil; to Muslims, an "affront to the Q'ran"; and to Buddhists, "a creature unable to ever achieve a soul or a place in the cycles of rebirth" (35). Emiko is only acceptable to humans if she can be utilized for human gains, if she can be used to some end, if she can be bought and traded to satisfy hedonistic urges. In turn, the nonhuman being is only accepted in an anthropocentric culture if she appears to assimilate to the culture — if she appears like she loves her enslavement. Emiko is aware of this inequality



throughout the book, contemplating that “if her kind had come first” before the human gene rippers, she would have been able to live in peace or at least not in fear of anthropocentric humans with their Western ideologies (114).

The conflict between Western ideologies glorifying humanity and Thai ideologies stressing interspecies equality increases throughout the novel until its end when a battle between Thailand and the Midwest Compact leaves Bangkok flooded and the Thai seed bank in exile within an underground network of Buddhist monks. In the end, a flood brings about a cleansing of the patch of Earth and the recovery of genetic agency is given to humans and nonhumans equally. The landscape once dominated by “fat, self-contented fools” at the Thai fruit markets littered with “waste,” “arrogance,” and “absurd wealth” is destroyed (64). Human arrogance in their anthropocentric ideologies lead to the destruction of society and catastrophe, as their ignorance destroys themselves as well as the nonhuman natural world with them. But providing a little hope, with the flood goes the anthropocentric ideologies, as the survivors are left to create new ideologies that could lead to interdependence and accept that the human species is not ascendant.

The novel finds comfort in one new ideology represented by a man named Gibbons, a renegade gene-ripper harbored by the Thai Kingdom. Gibbons’ attitude towards humanity is that “we all should be windups by now” (243). The novel, through Gibbons, remains skeptical about nostalgia for a human-centered identity, stating that humans “refuse to adapt” (243). In a diatribe against this refusal, Gibbons says humanity “clings to some idea of humanity that evolved in concert with their environment over millennia, and which you now, perversely, refuse to remain in lockstep with” (243). Gibbons’ reprimand, though in context meant to be distasteful, gives an alternative narrative to anthropocentric ideologies, an understanding that in the constantly

shifting environmental, chemical, and genetic landscape, survival is ultimately incompatible with anthropocentric ideologies purported by the Grahamites, the Buddhists, and the Midwest Compact. Not based in anthropocentric glorification, the alternative ideology Gibbons and the Thai gene rippers espouse represents humanity's best hope to, as the Grahamites promise, "restore Eden" using "the knowledge of ages to accomplish it" (92).

The novel ends with Gibbons promising to give Emiko reproductive rights saying, "nothing about you is inevitable," and "someday, perhaps, all people will be New People and you will look back on us as we now look back on poor Neanderthals" (358). Gibbons clearly advocates this new ideologies deriding Thai genetic quarantines and embargoes and Grahamites Niche Teachings as symptoms of the same naive romanticism:

The ecosystem unravelled when man first went a-seafaring. When we first lit fires on the broad savannas of Africa. We have only accelerated the phenomenon. The food web you talk about is nostalgia, nothing more. Nature [...] We are nature. Our every tinkering is nature, our every biological striving. We are what we are and the world is ours. We are its gods. Your only difficulty is your unwillingness to unleash your potential fully upon it. (243)

Gibbons promises to overcome the problems of life in a technologically compromised nature by increasing technology in it, while the Environmental Ministry fears the prospect that his thinking will generate new terrors that may exacerbate those humanity already faces. In "The Challenge of Imaging Ecological Futures: Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* in Science Fiction Studies," Andrew Hageman argues that Gibbons is not a "simple role model of ecologically minded hospitality toward which we should aspire" (297). Although, unlike most of his mad-scientist predecessors in the genre, Gibbons acknowledges and even takes responsibility for the

repercussions of genetic meddling, even as he also clings to a hubristic rhetorical argument for god-like power for humanity, saying that if the world just let him be, he would “be [humanity’s] god and shape [humans] to the Eden that beckons us” (243).

Ultimately, however, it is unclear which side we are supposed to sympathize with: the Grahamite longing for the restoration of a pristinely pre-technological world, or a technofuturistic Eden with Emiko, or at least her DNA, as the new Eve of a genetically enhanced humanity. But one thing is clear: the ideologies glorifying the human beings do not work in a world with posthumans. *The Windup Girl* shows the tensions present in current conflicting ideologies as the narrative concludes not with a return to an idealized, pre-technological nature or futurist Eden, but with a flood that provides humans the potential to not repeat the same anthropocentric mistakes in the Judeo-Christian flood narrative. Bacigalupi’s novel depicts multiple “natures” in multiple, dialogical relationships, and its final chapter leaves open the possibility for a new ideological paradigm to emerge, a model of biotechnology and agriculture that combines laboratory genetics, and human empathy and intuition, all mixed with equality for humans and nonhumans alike.

Atwood explores the problems of anthropocentric ideologies existing in a landscape inhabited by both humans and nonhumans — but in a completely different way. Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* points out the dangers of forcing anthropocentric and specist ideologies on nonhuman populations through ignorance and negligence. The dystopian novel focuses at once on the aftermath of a biotechnological apocalypse, as well as the anthropocentric cultural machine that drove the world to it. Atwood’s novel serves as a warning, or as Coral Ann Howell argues in her article “Margaret Atwood’s Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*,” Atwood implies that there is a still “chance, and therefore hope,” for the

human species to correct its anthropocentric and specist views (Howell 161). The novel provides a chance for humanity to rethink how humanity treats nonhuman beings, and, as many critics say, that both Atwood presents the possible detrimental ecological and cultural effects of humanity's anthropocentric interference in the evolutionary process in its incessant, juvenile search for a genetically modified Holy Grail. However, Atwood's novel also acts as a warning against humanity passing on its own self-glorification to posthuman beings. Through her protagonist Snowman, these ideologies pass from the very last of humanity to the very first of the posthuman Crakers, opening up the potential for the entire apocalyptic process to start over again, showing how harmful these ideologies truly are and arguing we must let them go.

Throughout *Oryx and Crake*, humanity's harmful ideologies and the physical and conceptual products from them linger and congeal in Atwood's post apocalyptic landscape. Snowman and the posthuman Crakers live in a physical world haunted by the specter of humanity's violent colonization — “cement-slabs,” “jagged concrete overhangs,” “derelict houses” with “pungent cellars,” and “clotted up ditches” all plague the environment around them (45). Humanity, in corporeal form, is all but extinct, but what the species passes on still invades the cultural landscape of the posthumans. What the bridges, houses, and ditches represent, the ideology that the inhabitants of the Earth are permitted, are allowed, are able to violate the Earth, stay alive with the structures themselves. These ideas stand with the monuments glorifying human rape of the landscape and become monuments themselves, markers to an all too familiar path towards domination and control.

But these markers are not without a prophet to signify their meaning: Snowman leeches off the reminders of the anthropocentric ideologies and their products as if they provided him life-force in the post-apocalyptic terrain. The merchandise of sadistic ideologies sustain

Snowman both physically and ideologically. The self-isolated remnant of humanity stockpiles cans “of Svetlana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages”; a “precious half-bottle of Scotch”; “a chocolate flavored energy bar”; an “ice pick for no particular reason”; “six bottles of empty beer bottles, for sentimental reasons” — all evidence that Snowman clings to an anthropocentric world that no longer exists (4). Biologically, Snowman needs to eat and the remnants of a previous civilization can provide sustenance: a can of sausages or an energy bar may be the difference between life and death for him. But the attention Atwood pays to the anthropocentric ideologies inherent in Snowman’s chosen means of survival shows Snowman gets more than just calories from these artifacts. Snowman does not just keep his liquor as a means of possible hydration, but as a “precious” means through which to sustain the memory of when liquor from different nations could be made and exported (4). Same for the empty beer bottles, which he keeps for “sentimental reasons,” suggesting the bottles possess more than a means by which to collect rainfall (4). The commercialism inherent in the “Svetlana” sausages, the fetishization of progress in the “chocolate flavored energy bar,” and the nostalgic reliance on consciousness-altering drugs in the “Scotch” and “beer” all point to a simple truth: Snowman refuses to let go of a world corrupted by anthropocentrism (4).

Because Snowman refuses to allow humanity’s ideologies to die, he becomes an unconscious agent on behalf of the anthropocentric ideologies his culture infused in him. Snowman becomes a virus through which the past-corrupted ideologies sneak through into the present culture of the Crakers. His person, his very physical being, is saturated with artifacts from the long gone past, as he carries his no longer working “watch” with him, a “talisman” heralding the “absence of official time” (3). Wrapped in a “bedsheet like a toga” donning an “authentic-replica Red Sox baseball cap” like a helmet, Snowman becomes a Roman-like figure,

guarding the anthropocentric ideologies of the past and imperialistically spreading them to new illiterate race of posthumans that he looks on with condescension (5, 6). Snowman is the safeguard of all that is human about the posthuman space: he colonizes the space with his very presence and the remnants he carries with him as a reminder that humanity once dominated, and may again.

But his physical attributes are not sufficient to pass his anthropocentric views onto the next generation of sentient beings on the planet. Snowman carries with him all of the ideological programming forced on him from the human society that destroyed itself. Strings of thoughts from anthropocentric ideologies involuntarily beat Snowman in the posthuman landscape; these thoughts tell of a “strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards good morale and the preservation of sanity,” an unconscious “directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations” (4). They create hallucinations of “beautiful demons,” the women as his sexual slaves, “beckoning to him, licking their lips, with red-hot nipples and flickering pink tongues,” reminding him of “some tart he once bought” (11). They remind him that he is “not here to play, to dream, to drift” but instead that he has “hard work to do and loads to lift” (40). Snowman carries with him centuries of a glorification of the human as a being that can buy and sell the Earth and bodies of minority beings. Snowman carries with him the culturally mandated imperative to progress, to continue a pornography of technology, and to hold himself as human above those who are deemed to be inferior. Indeed, Snowman carries in his mind the very idea that there is such a concept of superior, that there is such a concept of inferior, and humanity alone can judge the difference. Within the bowels of his mind, in the unconscious rattlings of his psyche, the anthropocentric, human-glorifying ideologies are alive and climbing outside into the posthuman world.

And inevitably these ideologies slip through, maybe unintentionally, to an innocent audience: the Crakers. In the new species child-like curiosity about the world they inhabit, they bring to their corrupt shaman objects to interpret called, “flotsam,” and instead of articulating the exactness of their situation, exactly how those objects came to be — in turn admitting the failure and fallibility of the Crakers’ creators — Snowman treats the innocents like a colonizer treated an indigenous population: with condescension (6). As the Crakers bring “hubcaps,” “plastic Blyss Pluss containers,” “Chickie Nob Bucket O’Nubbins,” and computer parts to him, Snowman claims there is “no way of explaining to [the Crakers] what these curious items are,” telling them the objects are “things from before,” making sure to keep his voice “a cross between pedagogue, soothsayer, and benevolent uncle” (7). He thinks to himself, “when dealing with indigenous peoples...you must attempt to respect their traditions and confine your explanations to simple concepts that can be understood within the contexts of their belief system” (97). Through this attitude, Snowman situates himself as a superior being with superior knowledge, inherently “an expert” on all aspects of before (7). He places himself, as the human, in the center of the Crakers’ search to understand the world around them, and in doing so suggests that he is an ascendant being. The rot of anthropocentrism, of the glorification of the human, seeps so far into Snowman’s unconscious mind that he must dominate the posthuman landscape even though he and his species is nearly extinct. Snowman cannot let go of his ideology long enough to consider the implications of making his ideology the center of the posthuman universe, even in these nearly unconscious ways.

Through this unconscious ignorance and this anthropocentric programming, Snowman imparts one of the more egregious bits of anthropocentric ideology: that humanity is chosen to know some truth of the universe that no other being can know. Snowman models to the Crakers,

largely as a way to explain parts of the posthuman landscape he does not want to admit the truth of, the act of revelation through divine means. Using his time piece, Snowman tells the Crakers he can commune with their creator — Crake (9). In response to a question from one of the Crakers about facial hair, Snowman answers, “I’ll ask Crake,” and “holds his watch up to the sky, turns it around on his wrist, then puts it to his ear as if listening to it” (9). He then responds to the question, “Crake says you can’t [have facial hair]” (9). A desperate act to explain why the Crakers were biologically programmed to not have facial hair, Snowman opens up the posthumans to the idea of divine knowledge, of revealed truth without evidence or facts.

Snowman creates a god — notably a male god — who only he, a human, can speak to. Snowman later tells the Crakers that he alone can listen to Crake, can hear Crake’s message, and explain the truth of it, and that truth cannot be questioned (97). Through these acts, Snowman creates an ideology based on the anthropocentric ideologies that were instilled in him. He creates from a broken ideology the idea that a single being, a single human being, can claim to know a truth denied to other beings. He creates the sense that he, as a human, can alone hear the voice of truth and of knowledge and therefore must be obeyed, must be heard, and must be given an ascendant place in the tribe. Through this act alone, Snowman opens the Crakers to the possibility that whole populations of beings can be controlled by claiming that they have a divine monopoly on truth. Snowman opens the Crakers up to the idea that it is even possible for truth to be known through supernatural means and that truth must not be questioned — all because the creator said so.

In this anthropocentric setting, Snowman sets up a creation mythology that he claims to know simply because he is the only one who can commune with Crake. By doing this, Snowman



sets up the Crakers' culture to have the same power dynamics as the anthropocentric culture that created its own apocalypse. He tells the Crakers that,

Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, then made their flesh out of a mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually she laid two eggs: one full of animals and birds and fish, and the other full of words. But the egg full of words hatched first, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they had eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that's why animals can't talk.

(Atwood 96)

In this creation myth, Snowman clearly divides the posthumans from the non-posthuman natural world. The Children of Crake, the posthumans, are "made" and "created" but the animals, the Children of Oryx, are "hatched" (96). In this difference lies agency, as the Crakers were deemed important enough by Crake to be made by supernatural means, and the Children of Oryx are inferior, as they continue in the natural, non-language speaking order. The Children of Oryx almost seem like an after thought, something to give to the Crakers so they can eventually consume since they quickly run out of words. Snowman also differentiates between male and female agency here, as the story can be interpreted that the females have more in common with the Children of Oryx than the more masculine Children of Crake: the now-ascendant species, after all, was created by a male god and the female god got the lower privilege of creating the lower beings, who cannot speak and who therefore cannot commune with the gods. The animals are less, they can't do what the Crakers can do, simply because their god determined and their prophet Snowman revealed that they were hatched inferior. Snowman passes on the dangerous

idea that there is some sort of divide between the natural world and the sentient one, and in doing so passes on the dangers inherent in Othering the environment.

By passing on his anthropocentric ideologies, Snowman opens up the potential for the entire cycle of destruction to start over again and primes the new posthuman culture for the exact destructive triggers humanity fostered for thousands of years. He told them that nature was less than, something to be feared and conquered; he told them that divine revelation is acceptable in a society, and that only a select few can hear the divine revelation; he told them that god is male and dominant; he told them that women were somehow lesser; he told them that they were only on the planet someone created them. Snowman began the possibility for the same thousands of years of chaos and tribalism, of people subjugating people and nature, of inherent and unexplained mysteries that lead to the emotional and spiritual enslavement of so many. This negligent passing on of stories so anthropocentric, so obviously fabricated for a single species' self indulgence, opens up the Crakers, the next generation, to the same horrors humanity faced. Even though the human species was nearly extinct, with seemingly one remaining person left, a single human with the ideologies apparent in today's society corrupts an entire population of nonhuman beings. That corruption is the danger of anthropocentric ideologies in the posthuman world, because it is accepts and forces inequality on anyone who touches it. That is the danger in the stories we tell and the culture we create.

To create a new culture, we need to tell new stories. We, as a species, need to decide that the conversation we've been having is not working, that in fact the conversation we've been having has been leading us to destruction and apocalypse. Anthropocentric ideologies enslave people with less resources in favor of those with more resources; they make people part of a simple equation of utility, not of value. Both Bacigalupi and Atwood deconstruct the

contemporary glorification of the human being by introducing posthuman bodies to anthropocentric ideologies. The cultural attitudes towards those bodies in *The Windup Girl* and *Oryx and Crake* critique a worldview that puts the human being at the center, in turn showing how dangerous and detrimental carrying anthropocentric ideologies into a posthuman landscape can be for humanity's survival, but also for nonhuman beings' survival, as the world crumbles into despair when superiority is introduced into the conversation. These novels serve as warnings to show the consequences of rejecting posthuman ideologies and excluding nonhumans from the political and cultural landscape. By heeding these warnings, humanity and the inevitable posthumans can create an equal society based on consciousness, not genetics.

## CHAPTER 3

IMMORTAL SUICIDE: TRANSHUMANISM AND DEATH IN JOSE SARAMAGO'S *DEATH WITH INTERRUPTIONS* AND DAVID MITCHELL'S *THE BONE CLOCKS*

Imagine a society where immortality is not a myth, but a reality — but only a small part of the global population can earn it. Some corporation has finally cracked the base organic code that allows humans to live an ageless existence without disease or consequences. In this world, there are immortals — who can get injured and maimed but can never die — on television and in magazines gushing about their lifestyles and how all people can finally achieve a never-ending existence. Imagine it is a relatively new phenomenon yet to be normalized or subjected to critical inspection. In an average person's lifetime, the immortality fad grows first only in privileged classes — the leaders and the rich — then in the unprivileged classes. Everyone is immortal. But everyone still acts like mortal humans, with all of the flaws and graces inherent in humanity. Westerners still subjugate and exploit developing populations, while racism, bigotry, sexism, and classism still persist. Then ask yourself, what good was achieving immortality?

That is the question Jose Saramago's *Death With Interruptions* and David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* push their readers to ask. The narratives exist in two worlds where humans achieve immortality, but nothing else changes — not our political structures nor religious ideologies, not our economic policies nor our environmental practices. The worlds' protagonists and antagonists continue to exist in immortal states, but humanity's behavior towards itself — and other species — remain unchanged, for better or worse. Immortal humans in these worlds claim superiority over death and mortals, continuing the political and cultural enslavement of peoples unlike themselves. Currently in contemporary Western cultures, immortality is sought after and movements like Transhumanism champion immortality as a necessary goal, no matter what the

cost. Transhumanists assume that death is a disease, and like any disease it needs to be cured. In this paper, I challenge that assumption by dissecting texts like Jose Saramago's *Death With Interruptions* and David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*, which look at the positive social functions of death and the unintended consequence of achieving immortality while humanity continues to have inequality in its political structures and among its cultural ideologies. These texts show that achieving immortality will not change the negative aspects of human nature; rather, it will disrupt current social institutions that promote community and cooperation, and further exacerbate inequalities in human society, which will inevitably lead to violent conflict.

Jose Saramago's *Death With Interruptions* and David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* position practical immortality as increasingly relevant when seen through a Transhumanist perspective. One of the central tenants of Transhumanist philosophy is the goal to achieve immortality, or at least achieve the option to have immortality until an individual agent decides otherwise — Sasha Dickel and Andreas Frewer argue “life extension is the overall goal of Transhumanism itself” (125). The method through which Transhumanists hope to achieve this state of atemporality is through life-extension technology. In “The Philosophy of Transhumanism,” philosopher Max More states that Transhumans define themselves as humans wanting to become posthuman beings that “would no longer suffer from disease, aging, and inevitable death” (4). Joao Pedro de Magalhaes even considers aging as “a sexually transmitted terminal disease that can be defined as a number of time-dependent changes in the body that lead to discomfort, pain, and eventually death” (48). Bolstrom, another well-known Transhumanist, even wrote the “Fable of the Dragon Tyrant,” in which death is perceived as a “dragon-tyrant” that rules humanity. The parable argues that for most of human history we lacked the tools to confront this monster but now we might finally possess the weapons to fight death.

It should be noted that the stated Transhumanist goal of life extension, at least to many philosophers, does not mean Transhumanists want to guarantee immortality for everyone. The methods of life extension typically do not promise ideal immortality, meaning that they typically do not aspire to achieve a state where dying becomes impossible altogether. Rather, the aim of these technological approaches is to transform the human body in such ways that death would only occur by severe accidents or by voluntary choice. On the one hand, this distinction distinguishes Transhumanism from former visions of immortality that just promised the same as spiritual or religious immortality, just in physical form. On the other hand this new world of tomorrow is still regarded as part of a reality that is not supernatural or mystical (125). But it cannot go unsaid that achieving the capability to potentially live a deathless existence, no matter how a person words it, is achieving immortality. A culture and society engineered to label death as an enemy and glorify eternal existence — like many ideologies and religions do today — could lead to negative psychological and even legal ramifications. Bostrom points out that contemporary Western society's

presumption in favor of life is in fact so strong that if somebody wishes to die soon, even though they are seemingly fully healthy, with a long remaining healthy life expectancy, and if their external circumstances in life are not catastrophically wretched, we would often tend to suspect that they might be suffering from depression or other mental pathology. (34)

Bostrom, and philosophers like him, argue that given the well-being of a person is taken care of — agelessness achieved, mental and physical health provided for — there seems to be no purely logical reason for that person to voluntarily end his or her life. If a person is *thinking* clearly, in a state of achieved immortal capabilities, that person should always choose to stay alive. An

individual who chooses to end his immortal life — to commit suicide — would be at least culturally dismissed as having a mental illness. So, too, is it possible that the choice to die in a culture engineered to prevent death and celebrate long, even immortal life, could become a matter of law such that a Transhuman utopia could call suicide a crime. In addition, in some forms of cyber transhumanism, and with the increasingly porous barrier between the organic and machine, it may be virtually impossible to die, as the increasing popularity of the idea among Transhumanists that conscious minds be digitized and downloadable may make suicide — the autonomous, voluntary choice to end corporeal existence — ineffective. Persons may shoot themselves only to have their subjective selves immediately uploaded into another apparatus — organic or inorganic — and put on trial for breaking the law. All of this is to say that, although Transhumanists express a libertarian view towards life extension, cautiously wording their arguments to not argue for involuntary and permanent life extension, it is not out of line to imagine a potential future where life extension is mandatory and, in effect, immortality becomes normalized.

Yet with humans becoming Transhumans — as the very act of labeling yourself Transhuman makes you Transhuman — and as Transhumans become immortal, they would continue to import their values into a world where technological inequality could only grow and grow. One of the serious flaws in Transhumanist thought, as I discuss in chapter one of this thesis, is the assumption that the biotechnological enhancement of the human species to achieve an ageless, effectively immortal existence will solve problems “inherent” in our species. However, immortality is not the absolute answer to the problems plaguing human civilization. Immortality achieved by humans will not stop human poverty, famine, inequality, or death. As Saramago’s *Death With Interruptions* and Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* show, an immortal status

will not cure the problems of the human, but exacerbate the socio-political and socio-economic struggles of contemporary society. Until the human species solves the problems that lead to the search for immortality, the novels argue that immortality cannot be achieved without inevitable conflict incredibly similar to the conflicts mortal humans already experience.

In *Death With Interruptions*, Jose Saramago provides an account of the ramifications a contemporary society would face if death no longer existed, or ceased to exist abruptly. For this reason, the novel provides ample opportunity to analyze the effects of Transhumanism's ultimate goal on the various social structures Western culture relies on. In the beginning of the novel, death becomes impossible for each citizen in a small, imagined country, seemingly overnight. Saramago imagines a world in which people live so long — an effective agelessness — that death loses its central role in human life. At first, euphoria grips the population of a small country as the people realize they cannot die, immortality has been achieved. But soon, the euphoria wares off as metaphysical, political, and practical implications of a life without death enters their world. Then, citizens realize that death has not been suspended outside of the borders of their country; they can still cross the border, and effectively die. The first part of the novel — the turn from humanity's euphoria over immortality to the practical problems immortality presents — is what I will be focusing on for my argument, as it best demonstrates how political structures, religious institutions, and individual humans react and cope with immortality. I will focus largely on how individuals react towards each other, first analyzing a scene of a terminally-ill grandfather and a sick baby, whose family chooses to take across the border to end their lives. I will then analyze how social institutions react to immortality, as their members find themselves irrelevant in an immortal existence. With each of these consequences, the novel argues that death serves as a lexicon through which humanity approaches life, and that a deathless existence not



only presents a threat to contemporary social structures, but argues for the necessity and importance of death in human culture. In addition to this, the novel shows the power dynamics inherent in the management and control of individual rights to death, in turn highlighting a conflict inherent in Transhumanism's goal of life extension.

Scholars have analyzed how the novel portrays the panic and cultural upheaval coupled with the immediate elimination of the possibility of death in a segment of human society, specifically looking at the novel's implications in the ethics of assisted suicide. Sandra M. Wierzba and Paul Harris consider the novel through a legal perspective, analyzing how the novel implicates legal rights to certain healthcare measures like euthanasia. Wierzba and Harris point out the novel shows the "universality and timelessness" inherent in humanity need for healthcare-related technologies related to death (149). They also argue the novel inspects Western society's current "need of third parties' intervention...for the implementation of practices concerning the end of life" (148). While arguably true and important scholarship, the current body of work has yet to relate *Death With Interruptions* to Transhumanism, specifically how the novel represents death as a social function humanity needs to continue surviving. Saramago, in showing death as a lexicon through which humans see and interact with each other, demonstrates how the elimination of death, or in other words the achievement of immortality, potentially creates an elevated class, in turn leading to inevitable conflict between power-hungry factions.

In the novel, we are first introduced to an old man on the edge of death, and when death is suspended, he begs to die. There is also a sick infant in the house, and the grandfather says the child should come with him, so the family sneaks out in the middle of the night to fulfill the grandfather's wishes and to end the child's suffering. Just as Saramago shows the considered,

reasonable desire for death in the grandfather's choice to cross the country's border, he also shows how humanity's reaction to death is written into human culture. Death, the novel shows, is not simply an inevitability in the present and future, but instinctually woven into the past, echoing throughout the human species' historical interactions with itself. Saramago writes, as the now immortal, yet sickly, newborn nears the border towards death and relief, "the child's mother...[made] sure he was still covered by the blanket, she didn't want the poor little thing to catch cold" (37). Though the infant child presumably can "catch a cold," the most extreme consequences of that cold do not matter — the child is immortal. It is the instinctual action by the mother to protect her child from possible harm, or even impossible death, that makes this scene important. Here is arguably the purest form of social connection: a human woman who created and carried in her own body another human being, who she then birthed, and now nurtures. A mother grieving the potential loss of her child instinctually makes sure that child is *well*, even though she knows and understands that child cannot die. The wellbeing of the child, nor the fate of him, is ever in question. This illuminates an unspoken connection, an unnecessary action from one human to another, linked by the specter of death. Without death or illness, this intimate social action would not be necessary — a mother would not need to ensure the safety of her child because ultimately, her immortal child would always be safe. Saramago shows here that in the absence of death, instinct from centuries of biological reinforcement between even the closest biological bonds are farcical, excessive, and unnecessary. The presence of death connects humans and maintains nurturing relationships, and immortality degrades that function.

Because of humanity's constant awareness of an inevitable end, the novel shows through the burial of the grandfather and the infant a social function death provides the *living*. Death, and the rituals that accompany it, creates bonds between the living, forcing and cultivating

community. This community can be seen in the burial of the grandfather, as the family “joined forces, with [the man] standing in the grave and [the women] above, and they managed, by degrees, to lower the old man’s body into the hole, the women holding him by his outstretched arms, the man taking the weight until the body reached the bottom” (39). The burial of the grandfather, the old patriarch of the family, is a relatively pure form of a funeral stripped of ceremony to reveal a social function of burying the dead: death breeds cooperation. Saramago explicitly states, with language saturated in cooperation, that the family, already bonded together by birth and genes, “joined forces” to bury the dead body of another member of their family. The author describes, in detail, what each member of the family does to continue the process of burying their dead patriarch. With each living person helping the other living people — physically and emotionally — bury the dead, a community of cooperation is built. Thus, a dead body links the community together and not only forces it to confront what to do with a dead member of its own, but forces the members of the community to confront death itself. As death brings a community together to confront the practical implications of death, it also allows — as Saramago shows — members of that community to help each other and to stand in solidarity with each other when confronting painful truths about the mortal human experience.

But Saramago does not stop at practical functions death serves — the necessity of social comfort and the creation of community — as he shows in the same burial scene how death serves a deeply social, spiritual purpose. Saramago uses the burial of both the infant child and the grandfather to show death as an equalizer in human civilization. As the family settles the grandfather and child, previously immortal but now dead, into their graves, they “lay [the infant] face down on the grandfather’s chest, and arranged the grandfather’s arms so that they were holding the tiny body” (40). The young and the old, both dead yet both clinging to each other,

symbolize the devastating connection between all humans and, indeed, all organic beings. The living lays the infant on the chest of the grandfather in an effort to carry sympathy and empathy beyond a materialist realm through to a spiritual one. An old man and a newborn intermingled with each other in death demonstrates the connection we all share — not only with the living but with the vast majority of the human species, with the vast majority of all beings, who have died. The young and old, the rich in experience and completely inexperienced, the literate and the ones with no concept of language, all bound by a single experience (or the greatest non-experience): death. The awesome expanse of organic life, which inevitably decays and dies, all headed towards a state of non-existence creates an infinite community, an understanding and accepting club offering eternal and intimate connection not only to the vast number of living being who will die, but also to the already dead. Death equalizes us all by creating a community that does not discriminate, that does not have prejudice or hate, but instead welcomes, even demands, the acceptance of individuals.

Just as *Death With Interruptions* demonstrates how death brings individuals together in a community, it also shows how immortality decays existing social ties and communities. Throughout the novel, Saramago shows how large social institutions that provide practical and spiritual answers to death's consequences immediately fracture when human achieves immortality. The Catholic Church realizes that "without death there is no resurrection, and without resurrection there is no church" (10). For private corporations, like insurance companies and funeral parlors, life without death also means financial catastrophe (22). The state faces the impossible possibility of paying pensions forever, while impoverished families with elderly and infirm relatives realize that only death saves them from an eternity of attentive care (14). Then, due to the social upheaval, a mafia-style cabal emerges to smuggle old and sick people to

neighboring countries to die, where death is still an option (35). Religious communities, like the Church, where people derive a sense of purpose tied directly to their belonging, can no longer serve their own purpose because the tenants — specifically, in this case, the connections all humans have with death — on which the community is founded serve no uniting function. Corporations, however flawed, are no longer able to provide a place for people to work and are no longer able to bring people together under the common goal to provide for their families or themselves. Economic devastation, in the book, leads to social distrust and the inability of people to feel secure in their own lives, so they stop caring about others' lives. The state finds it is unable to serve its main function: to protect and serve the people living in it. All this social erosion comes directly from immortality, as the support structures on which human civilization has built itself on — religion, property, sovereignty — fall when individuals no longer feel like they need to care about each other or care for each other in larger social units, in order to survive.

Even though the death's reprieve leads to larger social institutions — religious, political, etc. — to begin to disintegrate, Saramago shows most aptly immortality's impact on human interaction through individuals' actions towards each other. Saramago shows the immediate isolating reaction from those who champion immortality as they sever the spiritual connection to their ancestors, explicitly stating that they who have achieved immortality are better than their mortal forbearers. The narrator states that, “the creation of a group firmly convinced that with the simple application of will-power they [...] could conquer death and that the undeserved disappearance of so many people in the past could be put down solely to a deplorable weakness of will on the part of previous generations” (5-6). Immediately, the individuals who have achieved immortality, who no longer die, compare themselves favorably to those who have not achieved immortality. Immortality gives the immortals an excuse to look at mortals as less than

or somehow inferior because of their enslavement to time. The immortals isolate and glorify themselves from their human ancestors with a colonialist's tone — those savage mortals who did not have the tools or mental faculties to achieve a transcended immortal state. Saramago, through the creation of this group, shows how immortality would bring about a division and an Othering of mortality and the mortal, who would be seen as less than or inferior. With this division, another connection — that to the human past — dissolves and is replaced with a sense of arrogance and superiority. If humanity achieves immortality, Saramago implicitly argues, then community shrinks.

But with the creation of that group comes another division in the society of the immortals, which shows that immortality does not cure the human of its nature. When opinion splits on whether immortality is a necessary good, the optimistic group who champion immortality turn violent towards those who question it, showing that violent, crippling conflict does not end, even if humans live through it. The champions argue that critics of immortality “doesn't deserve to live,” or have “sold out to death,” and in one instance “one poor man had to pay for his unpatriotic outburst with a beating which...would have put an end to his miserable life” (16, 17). Saramago shows that even if humanity is “cured” of death, it cannot be cured of its violent impulses. Just as Transhumanists see life extension and subsequent immortality as a moral good, the champions of immortality in Saramago's story see the achievement of immortality as an unquestionable positive. Humanity's historic obsession with control and power will continue despite the suspension of death, and humans will continue to fight violently over points of view, over allegiances, and over who or what deserves to live. Saramago argues that an immortal human is still a human, with all the violent and ignorant impulses in tact. The

separation of the human from mortality does not mean the human is separated from its infinitely complex base instincts and mysterious nature.

Because Transhumanism's glorification of life extension does not mean the elimination or alteration of human nature and human faults, humanity will carry its prejudices and problems into an immortal age, possibly exacerbating those inequalities in the process. Though the human species is magnificent in many ways, some of its members also apparently have an obsession with control and power. That faction will continue despite the suspension of death, as humans will still essentially be human. It seems necessary, in order for the argument to have full impact, that humans have believed — and continue to believe — in the ability to achieve immortality for thousands of years before Transhumanism. The Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament testify to a belief in the reality of an afterlife for individual persons, often described in terms of bodily resurrection, but there is also an affirmation that, at death prior to resurrection, the soul — the individual subjective self that was once corporeal — is in a real, immortal afterlife (Ezekiel 37; Genesis 37: 35; Job 3: 13; Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1-4). Early Christian philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas argued that given the thought that the soul is immaterial, it can survive the death of the body it inhabits. In *A Brief History of the Soul*, Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro argue that Aquinas' belief that "man naturally desires to exist forever" comes from the soul coupled with his belief in an afterlife as attested to by the Bible, he affirms that the soul is immortal and survives death (55). More contemporary theists, like Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus, carry this belief, as Neuhaus argues that the immortality of the soul is certain and "the essential person...is the soul" (Neuhaus 71-72). In other words, the soul is the subjective self-described by philosophers and scientists alike as consciousness. For theologians across the

centuries, this subjective consciousness survives death and proceeds to an eternal afterlife. The soul, the subjective self, not the physical self, continues.

Although the Judeo-Christian concepts of immortality provide the Western cultural foundation for the Transhuman impulse to seek immortality, philosophies of the West are not alone in their insistence that immortality *can* be and *should* be found. The Chinese philosopher Confucius, who died 479 years before the supposed death (and subsequent resurrection) of the Nazarene Jesus, preached the worship of ancestor spirits, who were aware — after death — of human affairs and could be summoned in times of crisis; Taoism under the Chin dynasty evangelized the belief that immortality could be found on “fairy islands, where the herb of immortality” grew; ancient Egyptians dedicated their lives to an immortal afterlife, which the *Book of the Dead* revealed could be achieved after a series of trials and tribulations; Buddhism has Nirvana; Hinduism has the transmigration of souls; the Greek Orphic mysteries said the human soul was a part of an eternal divine. The idea of immortality has been around since humans could articulate it, distinctly tied to human culture and veraciously able to rise in one ideology while simultaneously and independently arising in another. The concept of the immortal is as fluid and constant as the concept of death throughout human culture, not just in Transhumanist thought.

In a world where immortality, or suspended death, is achieved, death will continue to be politicized death. Colonizing forces will turn the Transhuman ambition to conquer death into a sort of arms race, as it will not be about living forever or obtaining perpetual agelessness, but about power, about controlling and manipulating bodies to serve a certain end. The differing views of how to obtain and maintain immortality will come with inevitable violent conflict, in which loss of life, even immortal life, can be expected. *The Bone Clocks* by David Mitchell deals



with these issues by following a century's long war between two immortal groups. On one side of the war, there are the Anchorites, who are Transhumanists in everything but name. They view mortality as a disease, in that they argue that "mortality is inscribed into [the human] cellular structure" making humans "ill" (102). The Anchorites use advanced technology, however seemingly magical or farcical, to "cure" that disease and achieve a state of atemporality, which "allows one to defer death in perpetuity" (101). Like the contemporary, real world Transhumanists, they seek to maintain a state of near immortality, that is they maintain an ageless condition that cannot die unless by fatal accident or self-inflicted wounds. They also achieve and maintain their agelessness through the use of advanced technology called the Blind Cathar, which consumes "psychovoltic souls of innocent people in order to fuel their immortality" (489). By powering the Blind Cathar, the Transhuman Anchorites resemble the idealized version of a contemporary Transhumanist. On the other side of the war, the Horologists are naturally "immortal with terms and conditions" (438). However, Horologists are individuals that are born, age, and die naturally, but then are reincarnated with the same consciousness in different bodies. Despite being effectively immortal, the two factions violently combat throughout the novel, each thinking their immortal ways are better, or at least more morally justified, than the other. Although, they differ in the way they maintain immortality, they both carry on their human prejudices, their need to control the fellow humans and manipulate the world around them, which results in the ongoing war between them.

The Anchorites' prejudices can be seen in who they choose to give immortality to, as well as the victims it chooses. The former can best be seen through their rejection of a Middle Eastern man named Sadaqat, a spy for the Anchorites on the condition that he too is given the secret to immortality, simply because he is not white. When the time comes, and Sadaqat requests he join

the group of atemporals, their blonde-haired, blue-eyed leader rejects him because he is a “talentless...*brown* traitor” (528). This highlights a distinct difference between the Anchorites and the Horologists: the Anchorites are a group of all white, all Western, Aryan-looking people. The rejection of Sadaqat simply because of the color of his skin challenges the tenant of Transhuman philosophy of individual, autonomous “morphological freedom” by exposing a flaw in the machine: human immortality is still human, and therefore will carry with it the discriminations individual humans have. The technologically-superior, all-White Anchorites represent the obvious racial disparity in the Transhuman movement, the majority of which is made up of white men who live in technologically advanced parts of the world. The rejection of Sadaqat, in turn, represents the implicit rejection of non-Western, largely *brown* nations — at once a legacy of colonialism and a practical truth that Transhuman immortality, if achieved, will be reserved for the largely *white* or privileged classes.

Just as this segregation can be seen in the group members the Anchorites select, it can also be seen in the victims those white members choose. This is best depicted in a scene where the group decants a soul from young Brazilian boy, showing that the cycle of Western and white oppression of less privileged, less technologically advanced societies will continue once immortality is achieved. The group sources and decants the soul of “a five-year-old from Parabsoplis, a favela in Sao Paolo” who “was bullied, friendless” for believing in Santa Claus, a belief which the Anchorites used to kidnap and decant his soul (413, 414). Here, not only the oppression and subjugation of non-white, underdeveloped peoples is highlighted, but also the continued economic enslavement of developing countries and their peoples. The Western, all-white group of immortals kidnap the young of a country populated by *brown* people, enslave him for their own purposes, and literally suck the soul from his body, leaving him lifeless. This is a

direct parallel to how Western culture sucks the youth, vigor, and life from countries victim to colonization, neo-colonialization, and globalization — among countless other atrocities perpetrated by white nations — as the nameless child is tricked into meeting a fiction created by large corporations to increase profits and dilute culture. The Transhuman Anchorites, though effectively immortal, subjugate and exploit those who they perceive as weak in order to increase their own power and their own lifespan, just as the West subjugates and exploits the lower socio-economic classes for the same reasons. Immortality does not change the prejudices and crimes of the technologically elite but exacerbates them.

Although the Anchorites carry their human prejudices into immortality, Mitchell's immortals are not all power-hungry brutes willing to kill and maim to accomplish their goals. The Horologists violently oppose the Anchorites much in the same way humanity opposes the same power mongers in contemporary culture. The Horologist point of view is best demonstrated in the soul-sharing ritual between two Horologists in an empty plain in South America. One relatively young Horologist connects to the soul of another — named Ester Little — and notices she was “a history of her people...that bound myth with loves, births, deaths; hunts, battles, journeys; droughts, fires, storms”; she was “not a god but a spirit guardian, a collective memory, a healer, a weapon of last resort, and a sort of assize judge” (433-434, 436). This soul-sharing ritual and its findings represent the mission in opposing the Transhuman Anchorites. The mortal immortals do not seek power or fame, but instead serve as witnesses to the human, the earthly, experience. The seekers, in a human ritual, share with each other the intimate nature of their souls and the souls of their people. Like a testament to the terrifying beauty in the human condition, the Horologists seek to preserve, not to manipulate or control populations of people through genetic modification or blood-thirsty legacy, the human condition. The Horologists seek

to honor and empathize with the pain and joy of the human condition, not to change it. Though hopeful and optimistic, Mitchell shows through the Horologists that the positive, ethically productive elements of human nature can also be carried through in immortality. But, as is ever the case, this direct opposition to the Anchorites inevitably leads to conflict, and death, invalidating the whole purpose of the immortal project.

The inevitable war between two parts of human nature — represented by the two immortal factions — shows the inevitability of violent conflict among humans who become immortal. Mitchell shows that the immortal war will result in the opposite of what Transhumanists seek — a long, healthy, potentially never-ending life. In the final act of her life, Ester Little detonates a bomb, which kills her as well as the Black Cathar, the technology through which Anchorites achieve their immortality (531). As the final act of the war between immortals, Ester Little, who represents the good side of human nature, kills the physical representation of power-hungry humans who have achieved immortality at the cost and detriment of others. Here, Mitchell demonstrates the inevitability of humanity society's achievement of immortality as the human culture currently stands. A group of well-intentioned revolutionaries challenge the ruling authority, resulting in the death and destruction of both groups — a mutually assured destruction of the entire species. The inequalities, the exploitation of developing populations by white Westerners, and the human need to resist that inequality and exploitation, carry over into the immortal realm, which ultimately decimates all parties involved. The final act of Ester Little and the destruction of the Blind Cathar serve as a warning to Transhumanists seeking to become ageless and effectively immortal while the same inequalities and exploitations exist in human cultures.

A conflict at the end of Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* clearly demonstrates that though Transhumanism fails, in the deaths of the remaining immortals — both the Horologists and the Anchorites — humanity's obsession with immortality does not die. The problems associated with immortality of life extension are not simply *Transhuman* — they are *human*. The conflict takes place in an environment of the degradation of Western civilization called the Endarkment. National governments have split their nations into “exclusion zones” and warning their populations of a “full meltdown” their utility infrastructure (550). The remaining population is made up of “thousands of hungry, rootless men, women, and children” who are constantly paranoid of Viking-like “Boat People landings,” or raids for food and supplies (550). Europe is hit with pandemics like “Ratflu” and ebola, even as the villages have “dwindling stores” of essential medicines (550). People are nostalgic for the times when people “used to get as much electricity as [they] wanted,” when there “was fuel to spare,” and the Internet worked (550-551). Western civilization, with its technological superiority, is all but extinct and with it goes the Transhumanism goal of material immortality. In the book, there are no immortals left, as environmental catastrophe lead to the destruction of the technology needed in sustaining immortality. With the end of eternally sustained technological advancement comes the end of Transhumanism, as that ideology is based on assumption that human-made technology will triumph over any catastrophe — including environmental catastrophe. The “Endarkment” demonstrates the arrogance in that assumption, as it kills the glorification of scientific exceptionalism and with it Transhuman immortality.

Although the technological advancements fail, and Transhumanist life extension philosophies fail with it, ideologies worshipping immortal existence have increased their power during the Endarkment. Muriel Boyle, a woman seeking political power through manipulating

people's "hunger for lost loved ones," embodies those ideologies. Boyle's campaign signs read "Endarkment is God's judgement...God's faithful say 'Enough!' Vote for the Lord's Party"; she "promises to reunite" people in the Christian church with their "dead" relatives; and her constituents believe voters should "put the Church back where it belongs...guiding [the] country" (574, 569). While the Transhumanists in the book were incubating an ideology based on life extension, or immortality through scientific means, different ideologies not based in science did not go away, but rather remained hidden in the background. And when the technology fails, like it does in the book, and creates a ideological vacuum, it is those ideologies not based in science, not based will quickly fill that vacuum with an equal and opposite reaction. Mitchell argues that those who promise immortality, those who promise life extension, and in return demand a dogmatic adherence to a narrow and convoluted ideology, are not actually seeking immortality, but power, not life extension, but domination.

That hunger for power among those who purport to believe in eternal existence can clearly be seen in Holly Sykes and Muriel Boyle's fight over Sykes' children attending Sunday school at the town's church. Mitchell argues that Boyle's insistence that the children be taught in a Christian god, in the Catholic Church, represents the potential power those that believe in an eternal existence given only to few can have over others. Boyle suggests to Sykes that the children Lorelei — a young, white girl, with "long golden hair" — and Rafiq, who Boyle calls a "darkie" from a "Muslim background," attend church, and when Sykes refuses, the candidate for the town's mayor relies that Sykes will "change [her] tune...when the Lord's Party's controlling the Co-op, deciding what's going into whose ration boxes" and that "the food in [their] bellies is Irish food. Christian food," adding "there's lots of houses going begging" (580, 581). Here, once again, we see the oppression and subjugation of non-white, weak peoples highlighted, but also

the vicious continuation of those who believe that they *know* eternal life can be granted to a select few and they alone can *select* those few. The white, Christian Westerner, who leads a faction of evangelical fanatics seeking to gain power through the exploitation of belief, threatens the young, the weak, and the brown by blackmailing them — by threatening to starve them — into adopting belief systems that they do not want, do not need, and are counter to their survival. Boyle's Christian faith, which preaches immortality, seeks to subjugate and exploit those who they perceive as weak in order to increase their own power. Here, Mitchell shows that a belief in immortality, whether it calls itself scientific or not, is not just a flaw in Transhuman philosophies, but seemingly a part of the human condition. By setting this conversation in a dying human environment, with no possibility of a Transhuman future, Mitchell points out a cultural challenge at the heart of Transhuman philosophy — that the impulse to achieve immortality is not Transhuman but *human*, and the temptation to use the possibility to obtain followers to a cause is human as well. The inevitable recycling of the idea of immortality in humanity society, even among groups of well-intentioned peoples, will lead humanity towards the same fate of the Transhuman Anchorites and Horologists — an extinction of the entire species.

Achieving endless life extension as a human does not mean immortality. Jose Saramago's *Death With Interruptions* and David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* demonstrate that achieving immortality will not necessarily alter humanity's apparent lust for power and war, and in many cases may potentially destroy human community and exacerbate the cast problems in human society. If history is any measure, war will likely follow from this divisive view of the world, killing mortals and immortals alike, which negates the goals of Transhumanists. Jose Saramago and David Mitchell push humanity to ask itself if immortality should be gained if nothing else changes in human society; they question the human ability to responsibility control the power of

immortality and not use it to exploit existing problems. Death is unpleasant and unfair, but we as organic beings are shaped by what it leaves behind and what it doesn't.



## CONCLUSION

When I started this project, I knew I wanted to research what could come next for humanity in the face of extinction due to climate change. I came into my graduate studies hoping to look at the intersection between science and mythology to find answers to what comes next. The question of what to do when faced with inevitable death fascinates me — how different cultures deal with the question differently and why — and it has been with me for a long time. I chose to study at this university because I feel it is my overwhelming duty as an Iowan to change the narratives we live by in the Midwest, so its people, including my family, can do more than just survive—so they can thrive. My life and my studies center around preparing my region to win an ideological war. There is no time for self-indulgence or masturbatory metaphors: because of escalating ecological crisis, redefining what it means to be human is a matter of survival. The stories we tell ourselves will determine whether our species lives or dies, and whether my nieces and nephews live in an Agro-chemical drenched hellscape or a sustainable world.

I believe studying literature (through an interdisciplinary lens) can help create a new future. So much of how we see ourselves as individuals and as a collective community depends on the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. Origin myths fix humanity's place in deep time, while the application of emerging technologies can be tested in imaginary spaces through narratives. So, too, as the stories we tell ourselves change, our culture changes, and right now, with our mass slaughter of other animals and our species' hope to create other (non?)human beings, we need new stories that reimagine how humanity interacts with other living beings. We must reinterpret the religious mythology that tells us where we came from, rethink contemporary

cultural narratives that worship science, and reimagine through literature how we can create an egalitarian society that includes other beings.

## WORKS CITED

- Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake: a Novel*. New York, Nan A. Talese, 2003.
- Bacigalupi, Paolo. *The Windup Girl*. San Francisco, Night Shade Books, 2009.
- Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2000.
- Benedikter, Roland, and Katja Siepmann. "Transhumanism: A New Global Political Trend?" *Challenge*, vol. 59, no. 1, Feb. 2016, pp. 47–59. doi:10.1080/05775132.2015.1123574.
- Bostrom, Nick. "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant." *Philosophy Now* (n.d.): n. pag. *Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas*. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.
- Bostrom, Nick. "Why I Want to Be a Posthuman." *The Transhumanist Reader*. Ed. Max More. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, n.d. N. pag. Print.
- De Magalhaes, Joao Pedro. "Integrative Systems Biology, Comparative Genomics, and Ageing." *Human Ageing Genomic Resources (senescence.info)*. *Ageing Res Rev*, n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.
- Dickel, Sascha, and Andreas Frewer. "Life Extension: Eternal Debates on Immortality." *Post-and Transhumanism* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.
- Descartes, Rene. *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Edited by Ian Maclean, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "Transhumanism." *Transhumanism*. *Foreign Policy*, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.
- Goetz, Stewart, and Charles Taliaferro. *A Brief History of the Soul*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.

Harris, Paul A., and Sandra Wierzbica. "David Mitchell's Fractal Imagination: The Bone Clocks."

*SubStance* 44.1 (2015): 148-53. Web.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Future of Human Nature*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016. Print.

Hageman, Andrew. "The Challenge of Imagining Ecological Futures: Paolo Bacigalupi's The

*Windup Girl*." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2012, p. 283. doi:10.5621/sciefictstud.39.2.0283.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "How We Became Posthuman." 1999, doi:10.7208/chicago/

9780226321394.001.0001.

Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on Humanism." *Heidegger*, Edited by William J. Richardson, Jan.

1993, pp. 530–552. doi:10.5422/fso/9780823222551.003.0028.

Howells, Coral Ann. "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx

and Crake." *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 161–175. doi:10.1017/ccol0521839661.012.

Hughes, James J. "The Politics Of Transhumanism And The Techno-Millennial Imagination,

1626-2030." *Zygote*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2012, pp. 757–776. doi:10.1111/j.

1467-9744.2012.01289.x.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York,

Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Istvan, Zoltan. *The Transhumanist Wager*. Futurity Imagine Media LLC, 2013.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Humanism of the Other*. Edited by Nidra Poller, Urbana, IL, University of

Illinois Press, 2006.

Locke, John. "An Essay concerning Human Understanding." The Clarendon Edition of the

Works of John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (2001): 1. Web.

*King James Bible*. Champaign, IL, Project Gutenberg.

Martin, Raymond, and John Barresi. *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Menzies, Allan. *History of Religion: A Sketch of Primitive Religious Beliefs and Practices, and of the Origin and Character of the Great Systems*. New Delhi: Srishti Book Distributors, 2013. Print.

Mitchell, David. *The Bone Clocks: A Novel*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015. Print.

More, Max. "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." *The Transhumanist Reader*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, n.d. N. pag. Print.

More, Max, and Natasha Vita-More. *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Mote, Frederick W. *Intellectual Foundations of China*. NY: n.p., 1971. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Edited by Reginald John Hollingdale, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Orwell, George. *Politics and the English Language and Other Essays*. United States: Oxford City, 2009. Print.

Rikowski, Glenn. "Alien Life: Marx and the Future of the Human." *Historical Materialism*, vol. 11, no. 2, Jan. 2003, pp. 121–164. doi:10.1163/156920603768311255.

Rivera, Luis N. "A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas." *The Journal of American History*, Edited by Charles H. Lippy, vol. 80, no. 4, 1994, p. 1428. doi:10.2307/2080618.

Ruiz, Ana. "The Spirit of Ancient Egypt." Open Library. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.

Saramago, Jose. *Death with Interruptions*. Trans. Margaret Jull. Costa. Boston: Mariner / Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. Print.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: an Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York, Philosophical Library, 1956.

Talmon, J. L. *The Origin of Totalitarianism*. New York: Norton, 1970. Print.

“Transhumanist Declaration (2012).” *The Transhumanist Reader*, Nov. 2013, pp. 54–55. doi: 10.1002/9781118555927.ch4.

Waley, Arthur, and Geroge Allen. *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Waters, Brent. “Christian Theological Resources for Environmental Ethics.” *Ecologists and Ethical Judgements*, 1996, pp. 67–74. doi:10.1007/978-94-011-6965-3\_6.

White, L. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science*, vol. 155, no. 3767, Oct. 1967, pp. 1203–1207. doi:10.1126/science.155.3767.1203.