Calum MacKellar and Trevor Stammers, eds., *The Ethics of Generating Posthumans: Philosophical and Theological Reflections on Bringing New Persons into Existence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), pp. x + 234, ISBN 978-1350216587. £28.99

This collection of thirteen essays from British scholars – primarily philosophers, theologians and religious studies scholars – adds to the vast, if relatively recent, work on transhumanism and posthumanism. The clunky expression 'generating posthumans', the motif which ties together all essays in the work, is both under-defined and (currently) unrealised. 'Generating' is meant to abstract the process of creation, with some authors (e.g., Calum MacKellar and Michael Wee) contending for a 'manufacturing' image, while others (e.g., Trevor Stammers and Gillian Wright) opt for a more familial heritage. But what is a posthuman? Although Bloomsbury also published *Philosophical Posthumanism* by Francesca Ferrando (2019) which posits posthumanism as a position separate from transhumanism and anti-humanism, the authors of this volume seem to prefer a notion of posthuman that is transhumanism taken to its extreme, and not a philosophical position beyond humanism. In other words, whatever a posthuman is, it is something that can no longer be defined as human, whether that be a human-animal hybrid, a cyborg, an uploaded consciousness, or something else. While Chris Willmott considers the technical question of what a posthuman is and whether it is scientifically plausible, most authors are imprecise in their discussion of what a posthuman is and whether they consider it a real possibility. To wit, it seems unclear that an uploaded consciousness, a genetically-modified child (such as Lulu, Nana, and Amy in China), a human-animal chimera, and a person with a pacemaker (i.e., a cybernetic device), would all merit the same moral consideration. As such, this reviewer feels the aim of the book could benefit from considerably greater nuance.

As David Gunkel has noted, in language surrounding robots and Artificial Intelligence, moral patiency has historically been treated as correlative to moral agency, which the western philosophical (and theological) tradition ascribes primarily to (human) persons.[1] Ethics has, therefore, been primarily about moral obligations to *persons*, and has only relatively

[1] David J. Gunkel, *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 46–47.

recently been challenged on this front by movements in environmental philosophy and animal ethics. Nonetheless, this is an important background informing the considerations of the authors in this volume, many of whom consider ethics intertwined with the question of personhood.

The first four essays of the volume therefore provide some of the most significant conversation of the whole work and set the ground for the rest of the essays. The authors of these chapters do not engage deeply in conversations about how new technologies will alter the human (a position which philosophers and theologians may not honestly be in the best position to reflect upon), but rather the deeper question of what it means to be a person. The authors each highlight different aspects of the discussion of what a person is, leading to nuances and interesting distinctions regarding whether and to what degree a 'posthuman' might be considered a person. Attributes considered necessary and/or sufficient for personhood, such as being a rational animal (p. 33), having positive values toward the future (p. 51), possessing intentionality (p. 26), and the nature of one's mind-body relation (p. 69), and so on, leave the question of posthuman personhood ambiguous and complex. At the very least, the authors of these chapters suggest that defining a posthuman as not a person is more onerous than giving it moral patiency. These essays, read together, also provide a challenge for any who would too hastily restrict moral personhood based on arbitrary distinctions which do not hold up in contemporary scientific and metaphysical considerations. Later essays in the volume typically have implicit or explicit philosophical anthropologies, and the discussion of 'ethics' is usually pre-set by the authors' presumptions on the question of personhood.

Subsequent chapters attend largely to ethico-religious evaluations of trans/posthumanism. There are many other volumes on transhumanism and posthumanism, especially from religious perspectives, such as the edited collections *Religious Transhumanism and Its Critics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022); *H±: Transhumanism and Its Critics* (Metanexus Institute, 2011); *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Georgetown University Press, 2011); *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement* (Bloomsbury, 2014); *Transhumanism and the Body: The World Religions Speak* (Palgrave, 2014); and *Building Better Humans? Refocusing the Debate on Transhumanism* (Peter Lang, 2012). With the wealth of reflections on transhumanism, most of them written by western

Catholic and Protestant Christians, new contributions should clarify their positions in relation to this conversation. Many essays in this volume tread material that is already well trodden. Matthew James offers a Heideggerian warning against *Gestellung* and posthumanism; Michael Wee articulates a neo-Thomistic physicalist condemnation of posthuman birthing; Christian Hölzchen puts forth a Kantian reading on one hand while James Eglinton supplies an anti-Nietzschean reading on the other. The dearth of references to established scholars writing on transhumanism (many of which are smuggled into the concluding chapter) suggests a lack of familiarity with the existing scholarship. Indeed, Eglington concludes his essay suggesting 'for the most part […] direct theological engagement with these questions [i.e. our 'interactions with disembodied artificially intelligent beings'] is lacking' (p. 103). I have not found theological engagement to be lacking, but I have found theological engagement with the pre-existing theological engagements to be lacking.

This reviewer argued seven years prior that problems of posthuman technological goals require new philosophical anthropological approaches,[2] not, in the idiom of Jesus, 'old wine in new wineskins.' It thus comes as no surprise that the most interesting contributions overall in this volume are the three essays provided by women. Two of these women, Deborah Blausten and Mehrunisha Suleman, provide the only two non-Christian religious perspectives. Since there really is a lack of Jewish and Muslim voices in this space (notably excepting the pioneering work of Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Leon Kass), these chapters contribute substantially to a broader interreligious dialogue on posthumanism. More significantly, however, all three essays avoid the typical 'bioconservatism' that theological reflections risk running without nuanced theological anthropologies. Rather, these authors tend to highlight the questions to be asked, the religious predecessors for such conversations, and the broader meaning of being in relationship. Gillian Wright, who supplies the final essay of the volume, asks the as yet unconsidered question of what it means to consider ourselves to be the kin of posthumans, a question other authors dismiss all together. I believe the questions all three authors ask – the questions of what we *owe* to those we produce, whether we consider them human or not – are more instructive and more important for the

[2] Levi Checketts, "New Technologies—Old Anthropologies?", *Religions* 8, no. 4 (April 2017): 52.

potential of a posthuman future than definitive conclusions that preclude considerations of what we owe the unbegotten.

Taken on the whole, this volume contributes a specifically British, Christian and Christian-adjacent, traditional bioethical answer to a conversation that has largely occupied American thinkers. There are unique contributions, and places where I found my thinking challenged in a significant way. Among these are those essays written by women, the opening conversations about personhood, James Eglington's engagement with under-represented theologian Herman Bavinck, and Trevor Stammers's reflection on the embodied nature of moral responsibility. These are, to the best of my own research, quite novel and instructive conversations which expand the question of 'the ethics of generating posthumans' beyond pre-existing arguments. Beyond these, however, much of the volume seems to repeat decades-old bio-conservative and bio-liberal disputes. Many of the same positions – Aquinas, Heidegger, Aristotle, Kant; references to eugenics, Frankenstein, the Übermensch; invocations of the unbidden, physicalist taboos, the importance of the 'natural' – abound here as much as they did in the first responses to transhumanism twenty years ago. There is nothing inherently wrong with returning to classical philosophical and theological positions, but these essays should give adequate attention to the thought of people like Celia Deane-Drummond, Elaine Graham or Peter Manley Scott (themselves all British theologians) if they hope to offer novel insights.

My take on the work is this: it offers useful new voices to the question of transhuman ethics while also providing support for many well-supported positions. There are contributions nuanced and distinct enough to help advance the somewhat circular cultural discussions of trans-humanism, but many of the essays remain trapped in the bio-conservative/bio-liberal impasse.

Levi Checketts

Levi Checketts is Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy and Associate Director of the Centre for Applied Ethics at Hong Kong Baptist University. His research interests lie at the intersection of religious ethics, economics and technology and he recently published *Poor Technology: Artificial Intelligence and the Experience of Poverty* (2024).

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