

Society of Adventist Philosophers

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Theme: A Little Lower than Elohim: Philosophical Explorations of Human Nature

Mathilde Frey

School of Theology

Walla Walla University

(509) 520-6601

Mathilde.Frey@wallawalla.edu

Proposal Title: Becoming Human: Re-reading Genesis 2–3 in the Era of Posthumanism

Proposal Abstract:

This study engages in a conversation between the Genesis creation texts on theological anthropology and posthumanism as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. What does it mean to be human? What should it mean to be human? Who counts as a human? These are not simple questions. While theological anthropology has long held to the transcendent and noble idea of man as image of God (*imago Dei*), the assumptions about human nature have contributed to notions of superiority and entitlement and to behaviors of dominance and control over other humans and species. In philosophical discussions, the realization that the powerful “man of reason” has become the reason for the destruction of the planet has led a growing number of thinkers to critically reevaluate established notions of humanist autonomy, privilege, and exceptionalism. The result is that today, more than ever, the notion of being human is highly contested and in the process of undergoing a radical transformation. In this regard, posthumanism challenges the hierarchical dualistic worldview of the anthropocentric world and attempts to reset our perspectives, be more humble about ourselves, and recognize and rebuild our relations with other humans and with the non-human world.

In this paper, I will highlight elements in the Garden of Eden story in Gen 2–3 that speak of difference and connection, transition, locales, the body, nakedness, and knowledge, and explore these in connection to the philosophical works of Deleuze and Guattari. The concepts of radical immanence, relationality, and becoming that Deleuze and Guattari have developed lend themselves to fruitful dialogue on spirituality and ethics especially when it comes to texts that have been used in the past in formulating doctrinal statements about human nature with exclusionary and harmful implications for women and other marginal people. By appreciating the multifaceted and dynamic elements in the text, with creation embedded in the materiality of the soil and of the human body, the creation story may become a text of heightened emotional engagement for the postmodern audience and influence an individual’s attitudes and beliefs. The posthuman that emerges from such readings is not the humanist Man or the pan-human of UN humanitarianism or of US military interventionism, neither is it the religious human in fear of the apocalypse. The posthuman is a more complex knowing subject, undefined, in flux, embodied, and embedded in a constant collaborative web with other humans and non-human agents.

“The miracle is not to walk on water but on the earth.” —Thich Nhat Hanh

The creation accounts in Genesis (1–3) focus on the Earth: land, soil, water, living beings —existing, breathing, and moving together. Right after that introduction, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” the first story quickly moves to zoom in on the Earth (Gen 1:1–2). The second story as well, “in the day when God made earth and heaven” there was an open “field” — empty and inhospitable, but promising, and “ground” (adamah) ready to get dirty in it (Gen 2:4b–5).

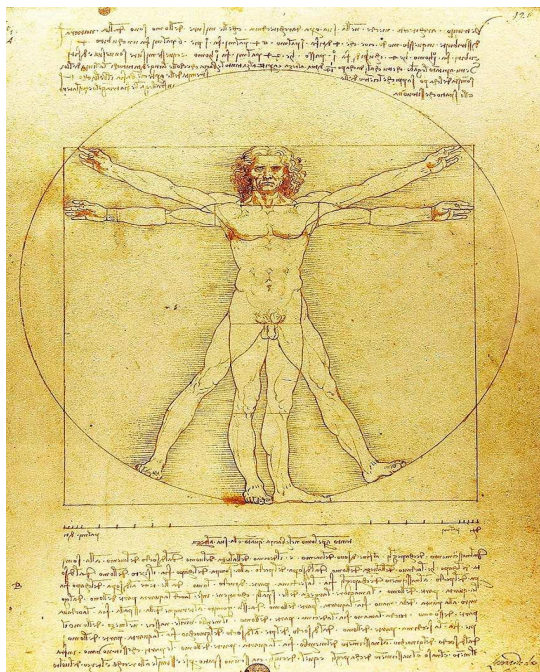
Is the story of creation still relevant? Is there room for it in a posthuman world?

What is Posthumanism?

Broadly speaking, posthumanism is a philosophical framework that questions the primacy of the human and the necessity of the human as a category. While humanism appeals to our shared humanity as a basis for creating community, posthumanism criticizes this way of thinking as being limited and full of implicit biases. Some posthuman philosophers even claim that humanism is not only false, but downright destructive.

Arguments of posthuman philosophy:

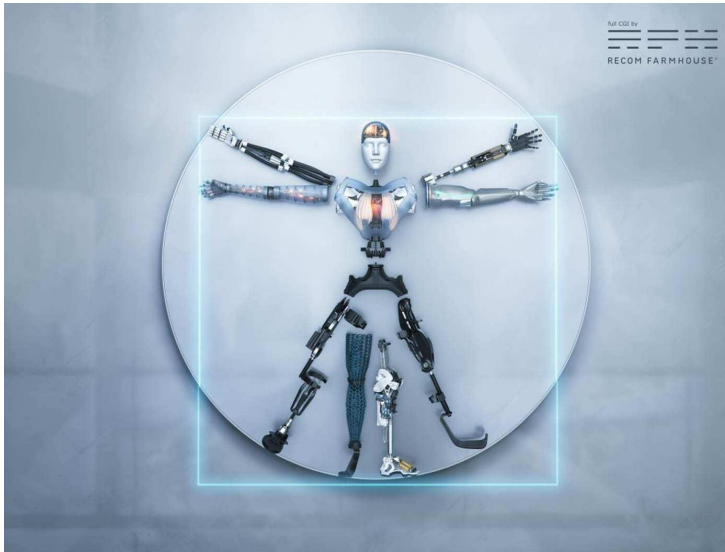
1. When we say ‘human,’ we don’t really mean ALL humans



The abstract ideal of Man as the symbol of classical humanity is very much a male of the white, European, handsome and able-bodied species. Measured against this ideal Man is everything else. — Luce Irigaray

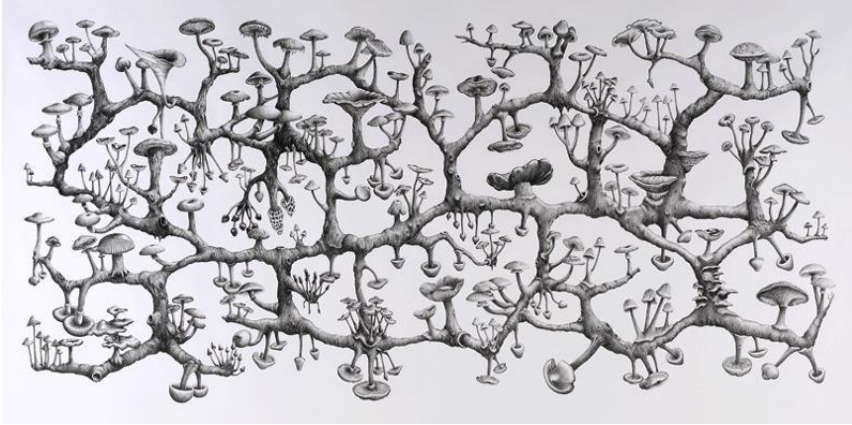
Posthumanism “rejects this dialectical scheme of thought, where difference or otherness play a constitutive role, marking off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (the animals, the environment or earth).” Rosi Braidotti

2. We are not as special as we think



“We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the dew in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man all belong to the same family.” — Chief Seattle, 1854

We exist as rhizomes



Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* use the rhizome to describe a process of existence and growth that does not come from a single central point of origin. The model is that of arborescence or the tree as the paradigm for knowledge and practice. A small idea—a seed or acorn—takes root and grows into a tree with a sturdy trunk supporting numerous branches, all linked to and traceable back to the original seed.

Goals of Posthumanism:

- Decentralizing
- Inclusive
- Non-hierarchical
- Multilayered

How do we Tell the Garden Story (Genesis 2–3)?

- Immanent

“Our ‘I,’ our personhood, is not a product of God’s action, something left over after the action has ceased. Rather it is God’s action in the very actuality of acting. ‘We’ are not a thing but an activity. This is why God’s activity of ecstatically moving out to us is an act of coinciding with our activity, just as our union with God will be our ecstatically moving out to God as an act of coinciding with God’s activity . . . This activity which we are, and which God is, is the act of creative freedom, of initiative, of self-originated self-giving.”
— Beatrice Bruteau

- Earth-focused

“The first thing we need to do is slow down and become aware of an infinite depth within, an ungraspable horizon of being which draws us in our beingness; this ultimate point of nothingness is the pure glory of God that radiates through our being as brilliant light. To know this point of dynamic ultimacy one must be attentive to the pull within

toward ultimate meaning and concern and hence to the infinite horizon of God. Slowing down includes learning about the universe that is our home. Try to find short pieces that explain the New Universe story and the realm of quantum reality that supports us.” — Ilja Delio

- Aware and Connected

“Perceived through the grid of wholistic consciousness, the world would appear as a pattern of inter-independence, complementarity, cooperation, friendship, and creative joy. Knowledge would be drawn from the level of which elements are synthesized, intelligibility being recognized as located in the Whole. In human relations. . . we would work by “both/and” methods, rather than “either/or,” striving for inclusion of all and reconciliation of differences. We would find our delight in giving ourselves freely and totally to the creative processive Whole, in company with all who together compose it and are themselves creatively contributing to it, each in a unique way.” — Beatrice Bruteau

“The posthuman means the human subject as autonomous being, exercising one’s will through individual agency and choice, gives way to distributed personhood where conscious agency is never fully in control; “thinking” is done by both human and nonhuman actors. We have always been, in a sense, posthuman, since each person is embedded in a matrix of relationships (family, community, friends, animals, machines, tools) in which relationships shape personal identity and personal identity shapes relationships.” — Ilja Delio

“The posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It 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.” — Katherine Hayes

“In the age of the Anthropocene, posthumanism is required to develop daily post-anthropocentric ethics of living based on an integral investment of its own post-dualistic process-ontological premises. Spirituality is a precious resource for this important task, as a practice which is enacted in each moment of being: the ultimate post-dualism of the posthuman resides in full awareness. Envisioning desirable posthuman modes of existence is a path of self-discovery, once the self has been recognized as the others within. In a spiritual sense, humans have always been posthuman.” — Francesca Ferrando