

Posthuman Dasein

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Abstract: Heidegger gives us a distinctive and new way to think about what sorts of things we are. He calls us ‘Dasein’ or (literally) ‘there-being’, deliberately avoiding more traditional ways of addressing us – including as persons, consciousnesses, rational agents, and even (in *Being and Time*, largely) human beings. If, *ex hypothesi*, the human being and Dasein are not identical, then in principle there can be human beings (e.g., human babies) who are not cases of Dasein and cases of Dasein who are not human. I explore the latter possibility by asking what it would take for a posthuman entity to be a case of Dasein. Asking after the possibility of posthuman Dasein brings into relief the distinction and relationship between Dasein and the human being and allows us to identify those finitudes that belong to us *qua* Dasein as opposed to *qua* human beings.

Keywords: Heidegger, Dasein, finitude, transhumanism, posthuman

1. If Heidegger and transhumanism are mentioned in the same breath, it is usually because the former is being used to critique the latter. Such criticism draws on Heidegger’s analysis of technology to reveal the ontological narrowness of transhumanism’s drive to minimise our biological limitations while maximising our intellectual, emotional, and physical abilities.¹ Here,

¹ These criticisms invoke Heidegger’s critique of technology as ‘enframing’ in “The Question Concerning Technology” (Martin Heidegger, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1997), 3-35). See, e.g., Jesse I. Bailey, “Enframing the Flesh: Heidegger,

I want to take the opposite approach. I will critique (in the sense of *interrogate the limits of*) Heidegger's take on what we are by appeal to a transhumanist concept: the posthuman. The posthuman is a figure who has transcended the human condition by being substantially released from at least some of the biological, cognitive, and emotional constraints that define the human being.² Such liberation is the goal of some (but not all) transhumanists, who aim

to reach intellectual heights as far above any current human genius as humans are above other primates; to be resistant to disease and impervious to aging; to have unlimited youth and vigor; to exercise control over their own desires, moods, and mental states; to be able to avoid feeling tired, hateful, or irritated about petty things; to have an increased

Transhumanism, and the Body as 'Standing Reserve', *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 24:2 (2014), 44-62; Jeffrey P. Bishop, "Transhumanism, Metaphysics, and the Posthuman God", *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 35 (2010):700-720; Bradley B. Onishi, "Information, Bodies, and Heidegger: Tracing Visions of the Posthuman", *Sophia: International Journal for Philosophy and Religion, Metaphysical Theology and Ethics*, 50:1 (2011), 101-112.

² Definitions of the posthuman vary among authors and texts. Hayles is typical in thinking the posthuman primarily in terms of transcending embodiment and/or materiality (N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4). Bostrom deliberately uses different definitions in different texts (Nick Bostrom, "The Future of Humanity", in *New Waves in Philosophy of Technology*, eds. Jan Kyrre Berg Olsen, Evan Selinger, and Søren Riss (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 204). In one, he requires only that the posthuman have "at least one posthuman capacity" (Nick Bostrom, "Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up", in *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, eds. Bert Gordijn and Ruth Chadwick (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 108).

capacity for pleasure, love, artistic appreciation, and serenity; to experience novel states of consciousness that current human brains cannot access.³

Such a posthuman might barely resemble human beings as we know them. And yet, posthumans are not entirely alien. Speculative fiction regularly presents us with posthuman figures, such as superheroes and cyborgs, to whom we relate as protagonists and antagonists. Perhaps this is because, while they are no longer human beings, these posthumans are nonetheless what Heidegger calls ‘Dasein’. In what follows, I interrogate the nature and limits of the relationship between Dasein and the human by considering what we would need to know in order to determine whether a figure who is no longer human might yet be a case of Dasein. What would it take to be posthuman Dasein?

First, let me establish the conceptual possibility of a posthuman case of Dasein. Some readers reject this possibility out of hand by implicitly or explicitly equating a case of Dasein with an individual human being. In most cases, the distinction between the two lacks a difference. But in contexts like the present one, it is important to recognise that being human does not belong essentially to what it is to be Dasein. In *Being and Time*, ‘Dasein’ indicates the entity that we each are, where ‘we’ are, first of all, readers of Heidegger’s text. With him, we raise the question of the meaning of being. We can do so because we already have a sense of what it is to be: what it is for an entity to be what it is (rather than something else), what it is for an entity to be there (rather than not), and what it is for the entity as such to be at all. We are the

³ Nick Bostrom, et al., *The Transhumanist FAQ: A General Introduction*, version 2.1. (World Transhumanist Association, 2003), 5.

entities that understand entities in their being (SZ4).⁴ Even those of us who do not practice ontology or read Heidegger understand entities in their being, if we go about making sense of them in terms of that and what they are. In this broader sense, ‘we’ are sense-making entities.

You and I are also (presumably) human beings. But there are human beings who do not or cannot make sense of entities: very young infants, people with severe cognitive disabilities, people in certain types of comas. These are human beings who are not cases of Dasein. It is possible that we ourselves move in and out of being Dasein, for example when we move in and out of non-REM sleep.⁵ Sleeping without dreaming is something that we do as human beings but it is not something that Dasein, the sense-maker, does. ‘Dasein’ and ‘human being’ are thus not necessarily co-extensive.

This fact is obscured by a shorthand such as ‘human Dasein’ (SZ51,198,382,401). Heidegger casually equates the human and Dasein throughout *Being and Time* (e.g., SZ11,14, 197,212), and after *Being and Time* he drops ‘Dasein’ and speaks directly of the human being (*Mensch*). Yet he never uses this term without ontological reinterpretation.⁶ Like ‘Dasein’,

⁴ Page references to *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)) will be given, in the body of the text, to the pagination of the eighth German edition (which is included in the margins of English translations) in the form: (SZxx). I decapitalise the translators’ ‘Being’.

⁵ Contra Taylor Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 232.

⁶ For example: “When we speak of ‘human being’ [*Mensch*] here and throughout these remarks, we always mean the essence of the historical human being [*Mensch*] of that history to which we ourselves belong: the essence of Western humankind” (Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn ‘The Ister’*, trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 51. Translation modified.

‘human being’ is (in Heidegger’s hands) formally indicative, and the two indicate the same: not *homo sapiens*, the person, or the human, but the entity that makes sense of entities, understanding them in their being. It may be the case that this entity’s “way of being is proper only to the human being”, but that is an empirical claim, true only “as far as our experience shows”.⁷ The sense-making entity might be most familiar to us as the human being, but – like Kant’s practically rational agent – it is not the same as it.

If a case of Dasein need not be a human being, then in principle a posthuman could be a case of Dasein. Whether it is so depends on whether it manifests the existential-ontological structure definitive of being Dasein. As Heidegger analyses it, this requires (for starters) making sense of that and what things are (i.e., discovering entities, interpreting) on the basis of who one takes oneself to be (SZ145). Taking oneself to be someone (i.e., projecting onto an ability-to-be) involves taking up some identity and throwing oneself forward into the project of going about *as* that sort of figure – as a seamstress, a sailor, or a student. Going about as a seamstress, a sailor, or a student consists in making sense of things as such figures do: as button-holes (to be sewn), berths (to be docked in), or books (to be read). There is no antecedent reason that a posthuman could not do this (although, of course, some types of posthuman might not).

What characterises the posthuman is having transcended human limitations. The human being is subject to the biological limitations of embodiment: death, disease, ageing, limitations of strength and other physical capacities, limitations on cognitive capacities, and so on. A maximally posthuman figure will transcend all of these, perhaps as a consciousness uploaded into a computer network. But the posthuman need not transcend all limitations. Nick Bostrom,

⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism’”, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 247.

for example, acknowledges that “[a] posthuman could be vulnerable, dependent, and limited”.⁸ Whether it is a case of Dasein will thus depend on whether, in transcending human limitations, the posthuman also transcends some finitude that belongs essentially to being Dasein – or whether it remains vulnerable and dependent in precisely the way that Dasein is.

2. Dasein’s finitude differs from that of the human being. In particular, Dasein is not necessarily biologically embodied. Heidegger does think that Dasein is alive (SZ50,194,246f), but whatever he means by ‘life’, it is more closely associated with being-in-the-world than with the body.⁹ Heidegger is ambivalent about Dasein’s ‘bodily nature’ (SZ108) – and its “abysmal bodily kinship with the beast”.¹⁰ On the one hand, our bodies are, functionally and evolutionarily, animal bodies. On the other hand, Heidegger wants to think Dasein’s sense-making as qualitatively distinct from anything that animals can do and so as independent of animalistic embodiment.¹¹ As best as I can tell, he succeeds at this latter in *Being and Time*.

⁸ Bostrom, “Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up”, 132.

⁹ For the association of life with being-in-the-world, see Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 14,16,31.

I take it that Heidegger would disagree with Hägglund, who sees “dependen[ce] on a fragile material body” as necessary for a “form of life [to be] intelligible *as living*” (Martin Hägglund, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019), 32). Hägglund’s reasoning seems to be that living requires an effort at maintaining life and such effort presupposes a fragile body. But while effort might require fragility, it does not entail materiality or embodiment.

¹⁰ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, 248.

¹¹ See, e.g., Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 264.

Dasein's existential-ontological structure does not require that a case of Dasein have a body – human, biological, or otherwise.¹²

It might seem that the human body is everywhere present, unacknowledged, in Heidegger's account of Dasein's engaging with the ready-to-hand. What is ready-to-hand is a tool, and Heidegger's primary examples are hand tools: the hammer (SZ69), needle (SZ70), door latch (SZ67). One would think that such hand tools require a hand. But reference to the hand is not what makes something ready-to-hand.¹³ What is ready-to-hand is what it is by virtue of mutually referring to other entities – such as nails, thread, and doors – within an entire context of practical intelligibility. This context is itself organised and made intelligible by reference to the identity that a case of Dasein has taken up (SZ84,86,144) – say, that of a sailor. The project of being a sailor brings with it a context of paraphernalia, each item of which refers to others, and through which the sailor lives out their life as a sailor. Thus needles and thread repair sails and clothing, hammers secure planks and hammocks with nails, and so on, all in the service of being a sailor. What makes the needle or hammer ready-to-hand is its role in the sailor's world, not that it is wielded by a hand.

Of course, *wielding* the needle or hammer requires a hand. One might extrapolate: all comporting towards ready-to-hand entities is embodied, skillful coping of the sort that we find in craft production and manual trades. But the extrapolation fails, because not everything that is

¹² See, for example, Katherine Withy, "Finding Oneself, Called", in *Heidegger on Affect*, ed. Christos Hadjioannou, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), where I offer an interpretation of finding (*Befindlichkeit*) that makes no essential reference to the body, while allowing for contingent embodiment.

¹³ Contra Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand", in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 176.

ready-to-hand is a hand tool.¹⁴ What is ready-to-hand is such because of its role in the life of the sailor, student, or seamstress. Following Aristotle (*Pol.* 1253a15), Heidegger distinguishes two broad ways in which ready-to-hand entities can be coordinated with the project of a case of Dasein: they can be usable or detrimental – a help or hindrance – to it (SZ83).¹⁵ Thus the ready-to-hand includes not only hand tools but whatever can help or hinder: traffic jams, lighting conditions, bank deposits, deadlines, emotional resilience, conceptual distinctions, and so on. It requires neither hand nor body to comport towards deadlines or conceptual distinctions. While it might require a body for there to *be* traffic jams, lightning conditions, and emotional resilience, there are plenty of things that can help or hinder a project that do not.

A body is also not required by Dasein's essential spatiality. To be spatial is to bring things near by *de-severing* or *circumspective bringing-close* (SZ105).¹⁶ One might assume that such proximity must necessarily be bodily, but – again – Heidegger understands it in terms of the space of meaning opened up by projecting on some identity. He gives the example of a friend approaching, who is existentially closer to us than the very street under our feet. He explains:

¹⁴ Thus I disagree with Dreyfus, who takes skillful coping to be necessarily embodied (e.g. Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Golob argues persuasively that interpretations of Heidegger along these lines import ideas from Merleau-Ponty (Sacha Golob, *Heidegger on Concepts, Freedom and Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ See also Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 41.

¹⁶ Dasein's spatiality also includes directionality (SZ108). Heidegger discusses human Dasein's orientation towards left and right (SZ108-109), but directionality as such concerns how things are intelligibly oriented or placed within a meaningful world (SZ111). This is the orientation that we track, for example, when we draw mind maps.

If Dasein, in its concern, brings something close by, this does not signify that it fixes something at a spatial position with a minimal distance from some point of the body.

When something is close by, this means that it is within the range of what is proximally ready-to-hand for circumspection. (SZ107)

If to be ready-to-hand is to be a help or hindrance to a case of Dasein living out its identity, then to be *proximally* ready-to-hand is to be an *immediately relevant* help or hindrance. The approaching friend is closer to us than the street because she is more immediately relevant to who we are trying to be.¹⁷ Being immediately relevant does not depend on proximity in space – as pay cheques, deadlines, and marriage proposals well attest. So too, bringing something close – that is, making it relevant to my immediate concern – does not require that I inhabit physical space. Heidegger allows it to be carried out ‘purely cognitively’ (SZ105), for instance; no body required.

3. An entity is ready-to-hand by virtue of helping or hindering a life project. This is true whether or not that entity is brought close so as to be immediately relevant to that project. If it is brought close, however, a further possibility is opened up: it might come so close that it touches or moves us. To be touched or moved by something is for it to be the object of a mood or emotion, and so for that entity to matter (SZ137). What matters (most) to a sailor, for instance, is the weather. Bad weather moves her to fear, while she is moved to hope by fair weather and fair

¹⁷ Of course, the friend is not an entity ready-to-hand but another case of Dasein. Heidegger does not seem to notice this difference – perhaps because the proximity of the proximate ready-to-hand does not differ from the proximity of the proximate case of Dasein.

winds. Fair winds hasten progress to the destination, and fair weather permits repairs and relaxation. Relaxation, repairs, and getting to one's destination quickly all help her to be a sailor successfully. What enables them is thus an object of hope. Bad weather, in contrast, is an object of fear because it threatens life, limb, ship, and cargo, and losing one's cargo, ship, limb, or life might be the end of a sailor's ability to be a sailor.

In fearing, something that is ready-to-hand *qua* detrimental – in this case, bad weather – “reaches what is threatened [...] with definite regard to a special factual ability-to-be” (SZ186, translation modified).¹⁸ Moods such as fear take what has been brought close in existential spatiality and *bring us back to* (SZ340) our life project as something that is put at stake by that thing.¹⁹ Thus it is when the sailor's ability to be a sailor is put at risk by a storm that she fears the storm. A storm that is not an existential risk is not an object of fear – even though it may be immediately relevant and a hindrance of some sort. Even though it is proximately ready-to-hand as detrimental, a mild storm does not *matter*. A storm matters only when it puts at stake for the sailor the very fact *that* she is a sailor and that she *has* a sailor's life to go on living (cf. SZ134). It matters, that is, when it puts at stake Dasein's thrown ability-to-be.²⁰

¹⁸ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger classifies weather phenomena, and more broadly natural phenomena, sometimes as present-at-hand (SZ118,250) and sometimes as ready-to-hand (SZ70f,95). Here, I follow him in holding that “the wind is wind ‘in the sails’” (SZ70) and so ready-to-hand.

¹⁹ Withy, “Finding Oneself, Called”, 166.

²⁰ Thrownness is sometimes interpreted differently, as Dasein's being situated in its body and its environment. I show that it is instead a matter of being stuck with the task of being Dasein in general, and of living out one's identity in particular, in Katherine Withy, “Situation and Limitation: Making Sense of Heidegger on Thrownness”, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 22:1 (2014), and “Thrownness”, in *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, ed. Mark Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

A bad storm puts the sailor at risk of existential death. This is not to say that the sailor might perish on the high seas. ‘Perishing’ is the type of dying that befalls living things, including *homo sapiens*, but not cases of Dasein (SZ247). Cases of Dasein do demise, which is a sort of social death (SZ247). In this sense, our sailor might be dead to her friends and family if she is counted lost at sea, even if she does not perish but lives on in an isolated port. But for her to die in the way that Dasein dies is for her no longer to be able to be a sailor. Perhaps she has not perished or demised but has recklessly lost her cargo in a storm, or done something dishonourable and against the sailor’s code. If either of these eventualities make it such that our sailor can no longer go on as a sailor, then she has died an existential-ontological death.²¹

Existential death is the constant, imminent, certain possibility of Dasein’s own impossibility (SZ250,258). It is the constant possibility that entities ready-to-hand will make it impossible to go on as a sailor, or seamstress, or student. This constant possibility is less of an event that might come to pass – although, it is that, too – and more of a permanent vulnerability that belongs to the structure of Dasein’s being. Such existential risk arises not from biological embodiment but from the fact that Dasein, in carrying out its projects, depends on other entities. When Heidegger explains what it is to be amidst entities, he finds that such facticity “implies that an entity ‘within-the-world’ has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the being of those entities which it encounters within its

²¹ That existential death swings free from demise shows the error in Hägglund’s argument that demise and perishing are required in order to take a project or commitment seriously. Of the project of loving someone, he says that, if you did not demise or perish, “you could feel no need to make an effort on behalf of the relationship, since you would have no apprehension that the other person could leave you or that your relationship could break down” (Hägglund, *This Life*, 43). Such breaking down is an instance of what Heidegger calls existential death, and it is logically independent of both demise and perishing.

own world” (SZ56). We live our lives in concert with other entities, on whom the success, failure, development, and character of our life projects depend. It is because we depend on entities in this way that existential death belongs to us as Dasein.

But being-amidst-entities is not the only ground of existential death. We are also subject to existential death because we are amidst entities *with others*. I mentioned earlier that our sailor might have done something dishonourable and against the sailor’s code. Because of this, the crew might reject her – in fact, all crews might reject her. In the best case, she is a sailor without a crew, and in the worst case, she is no longer a sailor at all. She has died an existential death. Alternatively, our sailor might breach no sailor’s norm but the sailing profession and lifestyle might become obsolete – perhaps because of increasing automation. In that case, it becomes impossible for anyone, including our sailor, to be a sailor. All sailors then die an existential death.²²

Being-with-others subjects Dasein to existential death because, first, being recognised by others is part of what it takes to be living out a particular life project. One can’t *be* a sailor unless the crew – or any crew, and people in general – recognise one as such. To be recognised *as* a

²² Notice that an existential death based on being-with-others resembles demise, which is a sort of social death, while an existential death based on being-amidst-entities resembles perishing, which is the biological body withdrawing life-support. Just as perishing and demise frequently travel together, an existential death might be attributable to both ready-to-hand entities and other cases of Dasein. For example, on Jonathan Lear’s account of the ‘subjective death’ experienced by the Crow people, and other native American peoples, at the hands of European colonisers, both types of existential death are involved: an obsolescence of traditional social identities, which become impossible to live out because of detrimental ready-to-hand entities (namely, laws passed by the United States government, along with the violence that enforced them, and the social geography of reservations) (Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)).

sailor is for one's day-to-day goings-about to given uptake *as* the sort of goings-about that characterise a sailor. One must be seen to do what a sailor does. One might do this poorly and so be a *bad* sailor – perhaps by swearing ineptly, or tying knots badly, or following orders too slowly. But to refuse any order, to not know any knots, or to blush when words turn blue – well, in that case, no one would think you a sailor at all. Nor would you be one.

We need others to recognise us as meeting the standards for who we are trying to be, and we also need others for those very standards to be. Whether the sailor's code is a written rule book or a set of unspoken social norms (or both), it is instituted, constituted, and revised socially. Thus while it might be up to me whether I am a sailor, a seamstress, or a student, it is not up to me what it takes to *be* a sailor, a seamstress, or a student. It is in this sense that Dasein most fundamentally 'belongs to' and 'stands in subjection to' others (SZ126,163) – not only in that it falls prey to fashions and trends, but in that it depends on others for the normative standards governing its life projects. This dependence is nowhere more apparent than when the standards change. If swearing ceases to be part of being a sailor, then no individual's defiant cursing will change that. Or, if automation renders the identity obsolete, the fact that there are no intelligible standards for being a sailor is a fact that belongs to the community. No mariner can stand as a counter-example to it.

The community broadly and the crew specifically are grounds of our sailor's existential death, alongside the weather. Dasein dies, then, not because it is (biologically) embodied but because it is amidst entities, with others. These together are its essential dependence and vulnerability, and so Dasein's proper finitude.

4. To be finite and so to be able to die in the way that Dasein does, a posthuman must depend on both crew and weather. To identify a posthuman case of Dasein, then, we ask whether the posthuman pursues a life project amidst entities and with others. Let me give an example of a (fictional) posthuman who meets these criteria. This posthuman started off as a human case of Dasein called Jonathan Osterman.²³

As a human being, Osterman has all the usual human capacities and is subject to all the usual human finitudes. As a case of Dasein, Osterman takes up the life-defining project of being an atomic physicist, which he pursues in communities that set the standards for what it takes to be an atomic physicist and recognise him for meeting these. First at Princeton and then at Gila Flats test base, Osterman goes about as an atomic physicist does. He does so in the midst of entities that help or hinder him: books, chairs, radiation, his lab coat, beer, the intrinsic field test chamber. Both these entities and the crews to which he belongs subject Osterman to the constant possibility of existential death – of no longer being able to go on as an atomic physicist.

But this is not the type of death that Osterman dies. Instead, he perishes biologically after being accidentally trapped inside the test chamber during an experiment. Apparently, something of Osterman's 'consciousness' survives his biological destruction. What remains can manipulate matter telekinetically. Over time, Osterman reconstitutes himself in corporeal form. His body appears similar to a human body – except that it is blue, and it possesses none of the usual finitudes. Osterman has unlimited strength and is impervious to death, disease, and aging. Further, because he can control matter, he has near-complete control over his physical

²³ Alan Moore, *Watchmen*, hardcover compilation. Illustrated by Dave Gibbons, coloured by John Higgins (New York: DC Comics, 2008). Originally published in single magazine form as *Watchmen* 1-12, 1986, 1987, by DC Comics.

environment and is thus nearly omnipotent. Osterman is also very nearly omniscient: he perceives past, present, and future simultaneously, and he is able to know thoroughly whatever he turns his attention to. Having overcome his perishing in a way that transcends so many human limitations, Osterman is no longer human. The Pentagon gives him a new name: Doctor Manhattan.

Doctor Manhattan is no longer human, but he remains a case of Dasein. He continues his project of being an atomic physicist, now greatly aided by his near-omnipotence and near-omniscience. He still participates in and contributes to both the scientific community and the U.S. government, and he still makes use of ready-to-hand laboratory (and other) equipment. Doctor Manhattan also takes up a new project: that of being Janey Slater's lover, and later, Laurie Juspezyk's lover. Being a lover of someone is a distinctive sort of project, since it requires a particular sort of recognition from a particular other: one must be recognised as meeting the standards for being a lover *by* one's specific beloved, and those standards are not standards for being a lover *tout court* but for being a lover *of that beloved*.²⁴ Because it depends on one particular beloved in these two ways, being a lover is a fragile project. This is to say that it is a project that puts one eminently at risk of existential death.

Doctor Manhattan dies an existential death when it is no longer possible for him to go on as a lover because his beloved ceases to recognise him as her lover. She withdraws this

²⁴ Being a sailor, in contrast, requires only that indeterminate others, including indeterminate other sailors, recognise one as meeting the general standards for counting as a sailor. It could be the case that being a sailor requires belonging to some particular crew, and so meeting the standards for counting as a member of that particular crew, in which case being a sailor (on *this crew*) would be just like being a lover (of *this person*). But it seems to me that it is possible to be a sailor without a crew in a way that it is not possible to be a lover without a beloved.

recognition when he violates the standards for counting as her lover. Thus Doctor Manhattan violates the normative standards for being a lover of Janey Slater when he becomes increasingly disinterested in her as she ages and he pursues a relationship with the teenaged Laurie Juspecky.²⁵ Juspecky, in turn, later sanctions Doctor Manhattan for failing to live up to the standards for being her lover – including failing to attend properly to her, and attempting to do so by replicating himself. Juspecky finds herself beginning a relationship with someone else who better meets the standards for counting as her lover. Along the way, but at no single, determinate point, her relationship with Doctor Manhattan is terminated. He is no longer her lover.

Doctor Manhattan continues to be an atomic physicist, just as most of us continue with our other life-defining projects when a romantic relationship ends. Existential death often leaves other projects untouched, thus allowing life to go on more or less as usual. But this is not quite what happens to Doctor Manhattan. He undergoes a deeper sort of existential death and so a more profound transformation. Considering this will illuminate the boundary on the other side of posthuman Dasein.

After Juspecky storms out of their shared residence, Doctor Manhattan learns that he may have caused cancer in those with whom he has spent time, including Slater. As a potential carcinogen, he anticipates rejection from the entire human community. And, having failed to meet the standards for being a lover of Laurie Juspecky, Doctor Manhattan finds that his only link to humanity and the world has gone. He takes himself to Mars. Mars lacks life, and its featureless red terrain offers minimal variety. Nonetheless, Doctor Manhattan spends his time

²⁵ It might be more accurate overall to say that Doctor Manhattan ceases to project onto the identity of being Janey Slater's lover, but my goal here is to emphasize Slater's agency in the breakup and so Doctor Manhattan's dependence on her for his ability to be who he is.

spectating the natural environment, including from within an enormous clockwork ship that he has created. As the creator of this ship, Doctor Manhattan resembles the Abrahamic creator-God, who is responsible for what is rather than being thrown into the midst of it. As the spectator needing minimal external goods for his contemplation of reality, Doctor Manhattan resembles Aristotle's philosopher-God. In either case, he is no longer a case of Dasein.

In truth, it takes more than moving to Mars to cease to count as a case of Dasein. That Doctor Manhattan is alone in a sparse environment strictly shows only that his being-amidst-entities ready-to-hand (SZ57) and being-with-others (SZ120) are operating in deficient modes. But the journey to Mars is supposed to signal an ontological change: Doctor Manhattan is no longer amidst entities and with others. He is no longer a case of Dasein.

No-longer-being-able-to-be-Dasein (SZ250) is a type of existential death deeper than, for example, no-longer-being-able-to-be-Laurie-Juspeczyk's-lover. The latter is a project that one takes up as a case of Dasein; the former is the project of being the sort of thing that takes up such projects in the first place. No longer being able to do this is no longer being able to be the entity who makes sense of things. It is at this point that Doctor Manhattan ceases to be one of us and becomes a different sort of entity – a terrifying spectre of free-floating, Cartesian, contextlessness.

Narrative resolution requires that Doctor Manhattan return (at least temporarily) to earth and humanity. He does so because he has an insight into the value of human lives as improbably singular. A more Heideggerian version would afford him a different ontological insight: what he has fled is being a case of Dasein, which is the vulnerable project of taking up identities, amidst entities and with others, and on that basis making sense of things. Such sense-making is the

distinctive task of Dasein, and taking it up in full awareness of the risk of existential death is what it takes to be an authentic case of Dasein (SZ308).

Doctor Manhattan does not become authentic, both because he does not have this insight and because he only briefly returns to being a case of Dasein. When he returns to earth, he takes up the project of being the saviour of humanity, and he carries this out with others and amidst entities. (The latter is confirmed by the fact that he finds his near-omniscience thwarted by tachyon interference, thus experiencing bad epistemic weather). Yet Doctor Manhattan does not take up his project as a life-defining identity but instead takes it up as an identity bounded by a completable task. Once he has completed that task, Doctor Manhattan can depart again from being Dasein. In doing so, he flees the risk of existential death and so is an inauthentic case of Dasein – until he is no longer a case of Dasein at all.

5. For most of *Watchmen*, Doctor Manhattan is one of us – despite his ability to manipulate matter, his simultaneous experience of past, present, and future, and his blueness. Like many of us, much of the time, he does not want to face up to the vulnerability of his life projects. He is vulnerable because he depends on entities ready-to-hand and other cases of Dasein, and this dependence subjects him to existential death. Being subject to existential death makes him a case of Dasein; that he does not want to face up to this makes him inauthentic. Having used the case of Doctor Manhattan to show that a thoroughly posthuman figure could be a(n inauthentic) case of Dasein, let me conclude by asking whether a posthuman could be an *authentic* case of Dasein. The answer will reveal one final point about the difference between Dasein's finitude and human finitude.

One might assume that any posthuman is necessarily inauthentic. In Heidegger's later thought, inauthenticity takes on an epochal form, as the technological worldview characteristic of modernity that Heidegger calls 'enframing'.²⁶ Enframing sees all entities uniformly as resources to be efficiently exploited, and so in terms of powers or capacities (to be maximally extended and expended) and limitations (to be surpassed). Minimising human limitations and maximising human capacities is precisely what leads to the posthuman. So, the posthuman is a product of inauthentic, technological sense-making.

Being a product of enframing, however, does not doom one to it. The transhumanist, who aims at the posthuman, is mired in enframed sense-making. But the posthuman who arises from it may have, in transcending human limitations, transcended enframing. Let me explain.

Enframing sees everything in terms of powers to be maximised (e.g. atomic energy, nutritional density, labour productivity) and limitations (whether temporal, spatial, biological, cognitive, or productive) to be minimised or surpassed (e.g., through automation, technological enhancement, or hacking). Long before we came to think of ready-to-hand (including natural) entities solely in terms of powers and limitations, we thought of ourselves in this way. Already in Ancient Greek philosophy (especially in Plato and Aristotle), the human being is distinguished from other entities by its particular capacities – primarily, that of the *logos*. Powers such as having the *logos* are housed in and limited by the material body, which presents an impediment to be overcome. Something like an early transhumanist impulse can thus be found in Plato and Aristotle, both of whom thought that the best life was one in which thinking was maximally liberated from the constraints of the human body (*Phaedo*), external goods and society (*Nicomachean Ethics*). Such a vision of the good life, based on a definition of the human being

²⁶ See Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology".

in terms of its capacities and limitations, is plausibly the first step on the road to enframing broadly and transhumanism specifically.

A maximally posthuman figure may be released from this way of thinking. This is because, having maximised human capacities and transcended human limitations, they need no longer think of themselves in terms of powers or capacities (to be maximally extended and expended) and limitations (to be surpassed). If they are a posthuman case of Dasein, they are free to think of themselves simply as a case of Dasein, defined not by capacities and limitations but by abilities-to-be and vulnerabilities. Understanding itself in these terms, this case of Dasein authentically understands itself as the sense-maker, subject to existential death. In doing so, it understands other entities in their various ways of being, depending on how they help or hinder its projects. Helping or hindering Dasein's projects – as button-holes (to be sewn), berths (to be docked in), or books (to be read) – is not the same as being a mere resource. There is ontological richness in the varieties of the ready-to-hand, and so a much broader ontology than that found in enframed sense-making.

If this is right, then it is in the very dangerousness of transhumanism that the saving power of the posthuman grows.²⁷ Does this mean that we should seek to overcome enframing by becoming transhumanists? Not in any cultural, technological, or economic sense. For, we are all already transhumanists in the way that matters: we think of ourselves as human beings with certain limited capacities. The real revolution will come when we cease to think of ourselves as human beings and think instead of ourselves as cases of Dasein, not limited but vulnerable. Only then can we cease to be enframed human beings and authentically take over our being as Dasein, amidst entities and with others.

²⁷ See Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", 28.

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