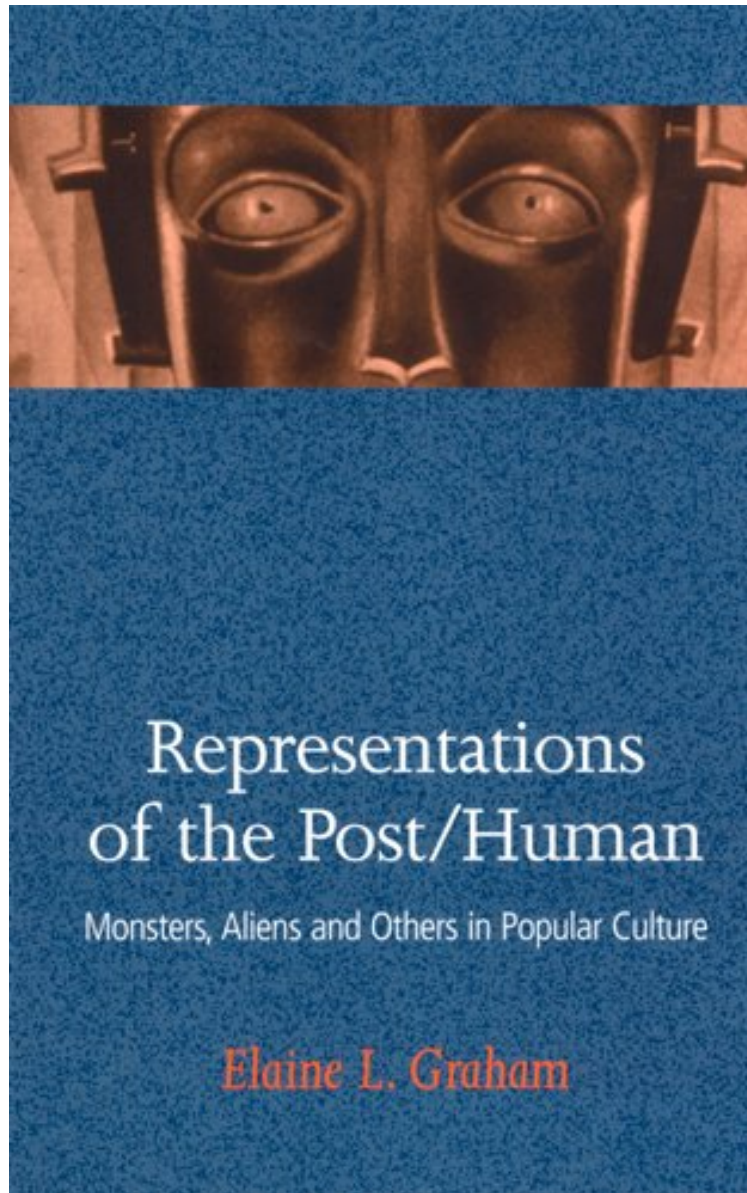


(Ebook pdf) Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture

Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture

Elaine L. Graham

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Elaine L. Graham : Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I found this book to be very well written and ...By CustomerI found this book to be very well written and thought-provoking. Arguing for an approach to an increasingly technological future that moderates between the extremes of 'technophobia' and 'technophilia,' and questions established societal norms/boundaries and the implicit power structures and systems of oppression they support; the author suggests that a post/human future can be a positive re-imagining of humanity. Very complex and insightful, worth the read.11 of 22 people found the following review helpful. Post-humanism and the Techocracy.By New Age of Barbarism_Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture_ by Elaine L. Graham is a disturbing book which attempts to make sense of what it means to be human in a developing society where that category is frequently challenged from a post-modern perspective. In particular, this book examines many of the recent developments in science and technology and considers what they have to say about what it means to be human and the possibility of post-humanity (or "post/humanity" as the author calls it). I should note from the beginning that I am not sympathetic to the author's point of view, as she would likely classify me among the "technophobic". I tend to think that the ensuing technological developments are largely leading us in the direction of dystopia (the only place where any "utopian" thinking will lead). While the author does not seem to advocate an overly strong "technophilic" attitude, she does seem to argue that a more positive approach is called for because it will enable us to move beyond traditional categories. This is where she applies her post-modern perspective, repeatedly arguing that man (and by this she means white males, solely) has been responsible for oppression (particularly of other cultures, homosexuals, and women). Her feminism and post-modernism at times comes across as shrill and hysterical and thus I cannot take it all seriously. (Assuming she actually does support some of the views suggested in this book.) For example, I tend to think that many of the proposed developments in genetic engineering (and other scientific and technological developments in general) represent violent crimes against nature and the natural order. I also tend to think that these developments are being exploited by a technocratic and corporate elite (who are effectively hornswagging the masses with utopian claims and overbold prophecy). While the author might agree with me on some points (for example, she castigates the Human Genome Project as relying excessively on corporate interests and overlooking Third World suffering), she would likely find my understanding of "nature" and "natural order" as reactionary and oppressive. Nevertheless, despite these glaring differences in perspective, I still found much of interest in this book. In particular, it showed me that coming developments in science and technology will indeed challenge our notions of humanity and it also revealed to me some of the dangers of supposing that the prospects of such developments are all positive. The Nineteenth century belief in "progress" and "humanism" is largely outmoded. The atomic age brought an end to all that, and more recent developments have even challenged further these original naive faiths. This is why I believe that it is necessary to bring back the notion of "transcendence" in a process of what the author would likely call "re-enchantment". The author seems to argue that such a program is reactionary. So be it.To begin with the author considers various reactions to digital technologies. For example, among those who argued that technology was leading towards disenchantment were Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger (though the author will later argue that Heidegger did not entirely mean this) (as well as the Unabomber who is not mentioned) who the author would refer to as "technophobes". Others have argued that technological "progress" is leading towards totalitarianism. On the side of the technophiles, some such as Michio Kaku and Ray Kurzweil have praised technological progress and advocated technocracy, others have advocated transhumanism (including ideas such as cryogenic freezing to achieve immortality and downloading one's consciousness into a computer), and some have argued that with technological progress a "re-enchantment" is possible. The author also considers the possibility of monsters (who were originally believed to testify to man's transgressions) and the idea of "science as salvation" (mentioning the possibility of relating modern day technoculture to Gnosticism, an understanding which I believe is particularly important!). Concerning "monsters", the author will argue that while these were originally taken to be manifestations of man's transgressions against the natural order and the consequences of sin (as for example seen in the writings of Saint Augustine and the French surgeon Ambroise Pare, writer of *On Monsters and Marvels*) that they came to represent "the Other" and were outcasted and scapegoated. Relying on the theories of Foucault and other post-structuralist thinkers, the author attempts to show how teratology (the study of monsters; from the Greek *teras* = monster) relates to the representation of "the Other" in society. In the next section of this book, the author brings up some important examples of "monsters" from science fiction, popular culture, and myth. The first of these is the monster from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While the author seems to obfuscate the point a bit, I think the message of *Frankenstein* was clear, when man transgresses the natural order, monsters ensue. Victor Frankenstein, the scientist in the story who creates the monster, is deeply steeped in various hermetic, alchemical, and scientific learnings, and his quest to usurp the power of the Divine and nature is apparent. It should be noted in this though, that the monster himself is not evil. In fact, he tries to fit into human society, despite his apparent defects. The author also considers the Jewish myth of the golem, an intelligent creature devised by the rabbis and intended to relate to man in the same way that Adam related to God. The golem of course is an important precursor of the robot (the term "robot" first appears in Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.*, and Capek was deeply versed in the legend of the golem). Throughout history, many mentions to talking statues or visages are to be found (especially in the ancient world), and these along with the golem legend serve as important precursors to the robot. Also, it should be noted that

the mathematician Norbert Wiener, who developed the theory of cybernetics, was very much learned in the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, and in particular wrote about the golem. Finally, the "laws of robotics" devised by Isaac Asimov should be mentioned in the context of robots. The author next considers various developments in genetics, artificial reproduction (and reproductive technologies), and artificial intelligence, mentioning some of the points I noted above about the Human Genome Project. The implications of some of these technologies are horrifying in their attempt to demolish the dignity of man (they certainly raise the specter of "eugenics" into the Twenty-First Century consciousness). Regarding artificial intelligence, the author mentions such writers as Hans Moravec. However, it should be noted that any artificially devised intelligence will ultimately lack a soul. The author then devotes a chapter to the series *_Star Trek_*, mentioning the roles of the character Data and the Borg. Following this, the author considers the prospects of transhumanism. In particular, the prospects of nanotechnology are discussed (beginning with Feynman's famous lecture and given form by Eric Drexler). The author also discusses the role of the computer and the internet (mentioning the various responses to the internet) and relates this to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. The author also discusses various possibilities for re-enchantment, relating modern technological developments to paganism and Gnosticism, as well as hermetism. The author then discusses the role of the "cyborg" (part machine, part human), especially in the writings of Donna Haraway. The author ends with a discussion of various spiritualities that are emerging in the post-modern world. Much of what is presented in this book is interesting, but ultimately horrifying. For those who believe in a natural order, it is very clear that technological developments are encroaching upon it. In the Twentieth Century, the atomic bomb (the ultimate destructive weapon) was the greatest product of scientific achievement, and ultimately led to much harm. In the Twenty-First Century, the greatest product of scientific achievement is likely to be in the realm of genetics. It too has the potential to do great harm.

Microchips. Genetic modification of plants. Cloning. Advances in technology promise to shape our lives more profoundly than ever before. Exciting new discoveries in reproductive, genetic, and information technologies all serve to call into question the immutability of the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. The category of the posthuman reflects the implications of such new technologies on contemporary culture, especially in their capacity to reconfigure the human body and to challenge our most fundamental understandings of human nature. Elaine L. Graham explores these issues as they are expressed within popular culture and the creative arts. From the myth of Prometheus and the Gothic horror of Frankenstein's monster to contemporary postmodern science fiction, a gallery of fantastic creatures haunts Western myth, religion, and literature. They serve to connect contemporary debates with enduring concerns about the potential and the limits of human creativity. This book breaks new ground in drawing together a wide range of literature on new technologies and their ethical implications. In her explorations of the monstrous and the cyborg, Graham covers the Jewish legend of the golem, the Human Genome Project, *Star Trek: Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Donna Haraway's cyborg writing, and many other related topics. This book will interest students in cultural studies, literature, ethics, religion, information technology, and the life sciences.

From *Library Journal* Graham (theology, Univ. of Manchester; *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*) covers the often-visited issue of what it means to be human, taking a different slant by exploring the matters of "posthumanism." Graham aptly explores the impact of today's technologies and representations of that impact in popular culture. From Frankenstein's monster to the Human Genome Project to the 1999 film *Galaxy Quest*, she draws on a wide variety of subjects to examine the question of what it means to be human. Although examples from popular culture are found throughout, the writing and subject are quite academic in nature and not intended for the casual reader. Recommended for academic libraries supporting programs in philosophy or cultural studies. Sarah Jent, Univ. of Louisville Lib., KY Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Gives us a compelling analysis of these technologies." -- Sharon Welch, author of *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work* From the Back Cover Microchips. Genetic modification of plants. Cloning. Exciting new discoveries in reproductive, genetic, and information technologies all serve to call into question the immutability of the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. The category of the "posthuman" reflects the implications of such new technologies on contemporary culture, especially in their capacity to reconfigure the human body and to challenge our most fundamental understandings of human nature. Elaine L. Graham explores these issues as they are expressed within popular culture and the creative arts. From the myth of Prometheus and the Gothic horror of Frankenstein's monster to contemporary postmodern science fiction, a gallery of fantastic creatures haunts Western myth, religion, and literature. They serve to connect contemporary debates with enduring concerns about the potential-and the limits-of human creativity.