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Humanity's Transhuman Future and the Ethics of the Other in Dan Simmons' *Hyperion Cantos*

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Abstract:

Dan Simmons' series of books – *Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion, Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion* – extrapolates from the present of an increasing impact of bio- and nanotechnologies on our species to the yet unknown future of an evolution towards the transhuman and the posthuman. The ontological dimension of such a hypothetical evolution of humankind has been sometimes more and sometimes less enthusiastically treated by such trans- and post-humanity critics as Vernor Vinge, Hans Moravec, Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, Michio Kaku and Katherine Hayles.

The objective of this paper is to draw attention to ethical issues brought up by Simmons that ensue from the fact that the conjectural bifurcation of mankind into the old style and new style humans (including man-created AI independent entities) would position the latter as the former's Other. Historically, moral obligations of members of a particular group or culture toward one another have been predicated on the idea of sameness which privileges those who are like us and disprivileges those who are different. Would the relationship of sameness still hold if humanity underwent a radical ontological shift, becoming at least in its part its own Other? As Simmons suggests, it would not, which would have to lead to a war of attrition, each against all. The author of *The Hyperion Cantos* speculates on the above mentioned problem positing that humanity's salvation lies in changing the attitude of confrontation to one of consensus and, in a Levinasian manner, rejecting the exclusive ethics of sameness while embracing the all-inclusive ethics of alterity.

Abstrakt:

Transhumánní budoucnost lidstva a etika Jiného v *Kantos Hyperionu* Dana Simmonse

Románová série Dana Simmonse – *Hyperion*, *Pád Hyperionu*, *Endymion* a *Vzestup Endymionu* – extrapoluje v současnosti vzrůstající vliv bio- a nanotechnologií na lidstvo v dosud neznámé budoucnosti, v níž se vyvíjí směrem k transhumanismu a posthumanismu. Ontologickým rozměrem takovéto hypotetické evoluce lidstva se někdy více a někdy méně nadšeně zaobírali kritici trans- a posthumanismu, mezi nimi Vernor Vinge, Hans Moravec, Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, Michio Kaku a Katherine Haylesová.

Cílem tohoto příspěvku je upozornit na Simmonsem vznášené etické otázky, které vyplývají ze skutečnosti, že hypotetické rozdvojení lidstva do starého a nového typu člověka (zahrnujícího i člověkem vytvořené umělé inteligence jako nezávislé subjekty) by druhý typ umístilo do pozice Jiného/cizího. Historicky, morální povinnosti členů určité skupiny nebo kultury mezi sebou byly založeny na myšlence stejnosti, která upřednostňuje ty, kteří jsou jako my, a opomíjí ty, kteří se odlišují. Byl by vztah založený na příbuznosti udržitelný i v případě, že lidstvo prodělá radikální ontologický posun a alespoň jeho část se stane Jiným? Simmons napovídá, že nikoli, což by mohlo vést k vyhlazovací válce všech proti všem. Autor *Kantos Hyperionu* spekuluje, že spása lidstva spočívá ve změně postoje od konfrontace ke konsenzu a, v duchu filozofie Emmanuela Lévinase, v odmítnutí exkluzivní etiky stejnosti a v přijetí všezahrnující etiky odlišnosti.

Ethical thought, understood as an intellectual manifestation of a primordial need of shared values vital for the functioning of the social, political and economic life of every society, is always concerned with a particular present viewed through the prism of past circumstances that affect it, but also keeps a lookout for possible moral challenges that future can bring. Although, historically, it takes the shape of ethical systems developed in the rarified circles of philosophical pundits, communal ethical standards are disseminated through the channels of religious teachings, codes of law and, more than ever in the recent ages of common literacy, through literary fiction. The issues of good and evil, right and wrong, of moral dilemmas and moral relativism have featured in such eminent works as Sophocles' *Antigone*, William Shakespeare's dramas, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Harriet Beecher Stowe' s *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* or William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, to name a few. The classics, in which realistic characters grapple with moral problems that arise in recognizable historical and social circumstances, do not arouse controversy as being eligible vehicles of moral reflection. But to claim that Dan Simmons' contemporary 21st century space and time opera novel series *The Hyperion Cantos* is a perfect means to convey the looming moral problems of our time can be a fairly daring thing to do.

Nevertheless, I would like to make such an assertion looking for support in the comments on science fiction drawn from two definitive experts in postmodernity, Frederic Jameson and Brian McHale. In *Archaeologies of the Future* published in 2005, Jameson writes:

> The representational apparatus of Science Fiction, having gone through innumerable generations of technological development and well-nigh viral mutation since the onset of that movement, is sending back more reliable information about the contemporary world than an exhausted realism (JAMESON 2005: 384).

McHale expressed a similar opinion in an interview he gave in 2008, where he said,

> Science fiction has justified itself by giving us tools for thinking about contemporary experience, as realism once could, but no longer does. 'Good old mimetic realism' has actually become retro grade with respect to the immediate contemporary world" (McHale qtd. in GRISHAKOVA – TOMBERG – PÄRN 2008).

Viewed in this way, SF as a genre appears to be adequately predisposed for assessing and diagnosing the latest developments that humanity of the postmodern era is undergoing. Despite its evocations of the future, loathed by stark SF opponents, the genre addresses current reality. Radically defamiliarized through the use of the technique that Darko Suvin calls "cognitive estrangement" (SUVIN 2005: 24), the present condition of the global human culture and the progressive potentials the culture involves can be more accurately rendered in SF narratives than in realistic fiction. While the latter is mostly concerned with what already historically exists, the former, on the merit of its make-belief, speculative mode, is capable of capturing the world's reality in the very process of its gradually becoming other than it is by presenting the familiar as no longer quite familiar, because it is subject to change. Thus as McHale concludes, "[S]cience fiction [...] serves the critical function of estranging the world, bringing us back to confront the way we are by the roundabout route of estrangement and alterity" (qtd. in GRISHAKOVA – TOMBERG – PÄRN 2008).

That currently SF narratives in general, and in this case Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* novels, are astoundingly well suited to address the issues of ethics ensues from the fact that in our fast changing world we increasingly find the ethics we live by as obsolete and thus wanting. Now more than ever, ethics practiced on a daily basis

tends to be increasingly more and more dependent on scientific and technological developments that keep redefining the human condition at a progressively rapid pace. McHale comments aptly in the 2008 interview when he says that "[r]ealism is not really well-equipped to deal with change at this pace, and it inevitably lags behind where we are now" (McHale qtd. in GRISHAKOVA – TOMBERG – PÄRN 2008). In turn, it is becoming less and less possible to determine where we are now, as the now is constantly accelerating towards a potentially new now.

We can no longer maintain that our world is safely stable and our ethical habits remain unchallenged. We may like it or not but our ethical thinking will need regular readjustments to the technologically-rich environment that is growing more and more complex. As Francisco Gonzales writes in *Values and Ethics for the 21st Century*:

> The world we live in is changing at an accelerated pace, driven by technological development and globalization. The speed, depth and scale of the changes to which today's people are subject continually cast doubt on many things that we believed or knew until now (or believed that we knew) (GONZALES 2011: 9).

As a consequence, he asserts, "we need shared values and ethics [...] vital for the proper functioning of the economic, political and social network [...] It has always been like that in every society, but today it is more than ever necessary that ethical values be reviewed and reaffirmed" (GONZALES 2011: 9). The need is all the more urgent as it is not in some hypothetical far future but just now that we are witnessing near-exponentially accelerating technological change discussed in the 1993 essay "The Coming Technological Singularity" by Vernor Vinge. The unprecedented change is also considered by the futurist Hans Moravec, who, generalizing on Moore's law regarding exponential growth in the complexity of integrated semiconductor circuits, plots the fast approaching appearance of conscious artificial life in his book *Mind Children* (1988) and later in *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcend Mind* (1998). In unison with Vinge and Moravec, Ray Kurzweil, a leading trans- and post-humanist, depicts in his 1999 book *The Age of Spiritual Machines* and his 2001 essay "The Law of Accelerating Returns" a vision of near future that may be shockingly unlike our familiar present. As he writes in his essay:

> An analysis of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential, contrary to the common-sense 'intuitive linear' view. So we won't experience 100 years of progress in the

> 21st century – it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today's rate). [...] Within a few decades, machine intelligence will surpass human intelligence, leading to the Singularity – technological change so rapid and profound it represents a rupture in the fabric of human history (KURZWEIL 2001).

And it is such a revolution in the patterns of humanity involving, according to Kurzweil, "the merger of biological and non-biological intelligence, immortal software-based humans, and ultra-high levels of intelligence," that we have to be ready for, not only as a cognitive but also an ethical challenge (KURZWEIL 2001).

The revision of our present ethics that Dan Simmons posits in his *Hyperion Cantos* takes as its point of departure the yet not ostentatious but nevertheless already perceptibly ongoing evolution of the so far seemingly well-established definition of humanity. The ontological redefinition of the category of the human entails serious consequences as it effects a parallel reconsideration of the variants of moral philosophy currently adopted as valid. What Simmons extrapolates in his SF fiction is the new world's refutation of the ethics of sameness and adoption of the ethics of alterity.

Functioning within a particular historical religion, culture or society, moral codes of individual rights and obligations towards others are based on the relationship of sameness. One has a moral obligation to others who are at the same time the same because they share the similar values and cultural patterns. However, the ethics of sameness does not apply to the others who are not equal because they are beings of a presumably lower status like slaves or infidels. On the ontological level, the ethics of sameness can lead to the exclusion of large groups of people on account of their being not fully human. The case in question in recent history are black slaves in the American south of the pre-Civil War period or African Pygmies, discovered by *Georg* Schweinfurth in 1870, who at the turn of the century still raised doubts as to being perfectly human; actually in 1906, 23-year-old Ota Benga and a few other Pygmies were briefly exhibited at the Bronx Zoo as an example of an evolutionarily inferior race (BERGMAN 1993).

Nowadays, in the era of intense globalization, a new trend shows which, despite the world's cultural diversity, envisions a shift form a relativistic ethics to a globally acceptable more universal one. In 1997, UNESCO initiated "Universal Ethics Project" that seeks a minimal consensus that would be capable of generating norms based on the Golden Rule that in one form or another has been supported by major world religions like Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism as well as by secular thinkers from diverse cul-

tures (NEUSNER – CHILTON 2009: 149). The more substantive principles like "a commitment to non-violence, to economic order, to a culture of tolerance and truthfulness and to sexual equality" would realize the general principle that "every human must be treated humanely" (STRUHL 2007: 15). Though cultural ethical differences would not be absorbed, the new global ethics would still be an ethics of sameness, this time founded on the idea of common humanity whose ontological identity is no longer questioned. Since the 1823 discovery of humanoid fossils by William Buckland, enough paleontological evidence has accumulated to trace our descent down the currently dominant hominid lineage leading from the pre-hominid Australopithecus afarensis, through Homo habilis, Homo ergaster, Homo erectus, Homo antecessor, Homo neanderthalensis, Homo rhodesiensis to Homo sapiens. Additionally, and decisively, the application of modern radiometric dating methods and mitochondrial DNA analysis to humanoid fossils has made us aware of unusual genetic homogeneity of all contemporary humans. Mitochondrial DNA tests of our genetic relatedness to the earlier humanoid branches show that all modern people are "derived from a single female haplotype (variant) that arose in Africa sometime between 290,000 and 140,000 years ago" (TATTERSALL 2008: 90). Consequently, the African, Asian, European, American and Australian geographical racial variants, so distinct to the eye, cannot be classified as subspecies. We can have no doubt about it that all the races constitute one human family which on account of its sameness should commit itself to overcoming existing differences while trying to create a workable common ethics.

It seems that after centuries of racial prejudice, conquest and colonization, the now integrally human world has reached a point past which a consensus might in time be possible on developing an intercultural ethics acknowledging sameness and otherness across cultural lines. But would that new pan-humanist ethics work if humanity had to ethically negotiate not the familiar cultural lines but strange ontological frontiers resulting from techno-evolutionary processes transforming humanity into post-humanity? The question is not quite hypothetical for harbingers of the changes the human race is undergoing are noticeable even now. Cosmetic surgery, anti-aging treatments, prosthetics, memory, concentration and mood improving drugs, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, in-vitro reproduction, sex change operations, genetic engineering, virtual reality and closer human-computer interfaces have become our reality (BOSTROM 2005: 12). Biological constraints of the human flesh will be overcome by medical technologies through prosthetic enhancements and nanoengineering. Transhumanist visionaries and futurists

like Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, Michio Kaku or F. M. Esfandiary, known as FM-2030, also foresee mental improvements realized through bionic implants and mind-computer hybridization. As Michio Kaku writes in *The Future of the Mind*, nowadays scientists can already

> insert a chip into the brain of a patient who is totally paralyzed and connect it to a computer, so that through thought alone that patient can surf the web, read and write emails, play video games, control their wheelchair, operate household appliances, and manipulate mechanical arms. In fact, such patients can do anything a normal person can do via a computer. [...] Scientists are now going even further, by connecting the brain directly to an exoskeleton that these patients can wear around their paralyzed limbs. Quadriplegics may one day lead near-normal lives. [...] Technology may also give us the power to enhance our intelligence (KAKU 2014: 17).

Such trans-human stage of human development might further evolve into a post-human one where as Katherine Hayles writes in her book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), there would be no "essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals" (HAYLES 1999: 3).[1] In consequence, such radical changes could result in the emergence of cybridized creations, a new species of posthumans ontologically closer to conscious artificial intelligences than to contemporary humans. The more and more pervasive alterity would certainly call for a new ethics.

Speculating on the possible posthuman future, Dan Simmons' four novels, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion*, and *The Rise of Endymion* question the validity of the ethics of sameness in a reality ontologically so varied that it can no longer endorse the ideal of commonly shared humanity. When the action begins, the Hegemony of Man encompasses over 200 terraformed planets to which, a thousand years before, mankind fled following Earth's pending annihilation from a miniature black whole. After centuries of space colonization, humanity at large has become to a lesser or greater degree transhuman. Apart from some backwater conservative worlds, like Hebron inhabited by orthodox Jews, the majority of people living on the major urbanized and industrial planets are dependent on techno-environment that is a constitutive element of their existence; for interstellar communication, they use Fatline (faster than light

1) While Katherine Hayles is mentioned alongside Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, Michio Kaku or Vernor Vinge as a major voice on the problems of trans/post humanism, it is important to note that in comparison with the others she is much more cautious and less enthusiastic about humanity's trans/posthuman future.

communications technology) and they travel near instantaneously through the Farcaster network of portals between different galactic locations. Their intellectual capability and memory capacity are enhanced by means of neural implants that provide them with access to Hegemony's datasphere. Eventually, the wealthy ones can enjoy an extended life span of over two hundred years thanks to nanotech Poulsen treatments.

While the Hegemony citizens represent a light version of transhuman development, there is also the other, Ouster part of mankind that represents the hard version. At the time of the exodus from Earth, the human race bifurcated. There were people who chose their own path of technology enhanced evolution. While "the Hegemony meant homogeneity" (RE 193), pursuing the quality of sameness, the Ousters went for unlimited variety wishing "to find unity in diversity.[2] To spread the seed of humankind to all diverse environments, while treating as sacred the diversity of life we find elsewhere" (FH 463). Using advanced nanotechnologies, they transformed their organisms to adapt them to zero gravity and the cold of outer space. Roaming sidereal distances in their artificially grown biospheres that feature "zero-gravity globe cities and comet farms and thrust clusters, their micro-orbital forests and migrating rivers" (H 460), they have evolved into a staggering assortment of creatures – furry, scaly, winged, reptilian and amphibian. Finally, completing the picture of a transhuman society, Simmons adds blue skinned androids bred for colonization purposes, cybrids (artificial intelligences in a genetically human body), and the TechnoCore entities consisting of sovereign super-AIs dwelling in the datasphere but cooperating through avatars with the human Hegemony government.

As presented in *The Hyperion Cantos*, the human kind is split into two distinctly different kinds that view each other as essentially and irreconcilably alien. Assessed by the Ousters, the Hegemony of Man as a species has got itself into a dead end by relinquishing the possibility of an evolutionary advancement that nanotechnology offered. The Hegemony people, in turn, fear and abhor the Ousters as in their understanding the latter "had evolved into something more – or less – than human" (H 137), which makes them unpredictably other for as the Consul says "they no longer appear to be motivated by human logic" (H 13). The utter alterity of the two branches of humanity causes mutual enmity resulting in acts of violence and suspension of humanitarian ethics on account of the opposing parties not agreeing on what it means to be human. Consequently,

2) In bracket references Dan Simmons' novels *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion*, and *The Rise of Endymion* will be referred to as H, FH, E and RE, respectively.

the alleged monstrosity of the Ousters justifies a galactic crusade against the race renegades. The outcome is genocide calculated in cold blood. No standard ethics applies where the aim is complete elimination of the alien other. Starship troopers spare no one, not even women or children. As one of them says:

> "We knew it was a birthin' rock…Nurseries. Wee beds with wee babies in 'em…not Ouster monsters…we fight against…just babies…we used the last of our grenades in those nurseries… [a]nd when the plasma grenades were gone, we lanced those incubators" (RE 164–165).

The impossibility of the traditional ethics of sameness in the face of incomprehensible alterity extends beyond the struggle between the opposing variants of humanity. The independent AIs of the TechnoCore, driven by their practical and obscure motivations are beyond anything that might be called ethics. Androids, feared for their more than human capabilities, have been outlawed, and cybrids, mistrusted and thus narrowly licensed, have become victims of, what one of them names, "The Frankenstein monster syndrome. Fear of anything in human form that is not completely human" (FH 14). In any of the cases, the others cannot be ignored but they are denied ethical consideration.

A remedy to the ethics of sameness, which apparently fails in a world of growing ontological diversity, is offered by the girl Aenea, who becomes an involuntary messiah of the universe. Herself "somewhat of a half-breed, the child of a Lusian woman and a cloned cybid man" (E 172), a daughter of Man and Machine, she is otherness epitomized. Being what she is, she finds nothing unacceptably other. To her the Ousters are human enough, for as she says, "They evolved from common Earth-human origins, just as the AI TechnoCore did. All three races are orphans in the storm" (RE 151). And to make it clear that AIs cannot be excluded, she adds: "We created them. […] Early on, we used human DNA to increase their computing power […] their intelligence. We used to have robots. They created cybrids out of human DNA and AI personae" (RE 152).

Exclusion of any other would mean persisting in prejudice and injustice, which always breed war and destruction. The only chance for a better world is a departure from the ethics of sameness and adoption of unbiased ethics of alterity.

Dan Simmons' ethics for the future posthuman age has something of a utopia, not only in its meaning of being ideal but impracticable, but in the way Levinas saw it saying "in going toward the other man we transcended the human, toward utopia" (LEVINAS 1996: 44), the 'non-pace' where the self gets transcended in its movement toward the other. The ethical duty that the girl Aenea takes on

toward the Other, understood as the countless multitude of all sentient beings is, using Levinas' words, "A duty that did not ask for consent [...] [that] came without being offered as a choice, came where my contingent humanity becomes identity and unicity, through the impossibility of escaping from election" (LEVINAS 2006: 7). Her unconditional commitment to her cause is characterized by Levinasian "radical generosity of movement which in the Same goes toward the other," demanding "consequently, *ingratitude* from the Other. Because Gratitude would in fact be the return of the movement to its origin" (LEVINAS 2006: 27). Though she knows they want to kill her, she surrenders to her enemies in a Christ like sacrificial gesture that will trigger a broadly spreading transformation of the Same into the all-including Other. The ethics of alterity that she proffers is not a normative code to be enforced but a free choice of a physical, evolutionary transformation into a super-species not just tolerating but actually promoting an unlimited diversity of life. All those who willingly partake of her nano-particles saturated blood undergo a permanent, genetically transferable change that enables them to connect with the "void that binds" which is a non-place or non-space that is all-inclusive. In its infinite openness to anything Other, "the void that binds" echoes the Platonic *khōra* that is "a third nature, which is space [...] and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended without the help of sense" (PLATO 2013) as in a dream. It is in everyone's relatedness to the void, and through it to others, that the ethics of otherness can be realized, for the *khōra* non-space is never same, never static, it is always in the process of becoming. As Derrida says in his essay "Khōra," "it/she is pandekhes, that which receives all" (DERRIDA 1995: 111).

The ethics of alterity as encouraged and somatically transferred by Aenea is an evolutionary advancement allowing for an instantaneous overcoming of the ethical prejudices against the machine life (both of the Ouster and TechnoCore provenance) by means of the process of the nano-particle embodiment of the unhuman other. This new ethical mode is natural to Aenea herself, who after all is a half-breed born of a human and a cybrid AI, and to those who will follow her messianic call wishing to undergo a complete transformation, both in flesh and in mind. But what about those who will stick to their traditional human nature? Simmons leaves no doubt about it that many, like the PAX fanatics, will have nothing to do with any not fully human abomination. But he also suggests that there will be others who will make a conscious volitional effort to reconstitute their relationship with the hitherto absolutely unacceptable otherness, the quintessential example of such an attitude being Sol Weintraub grappling with the Abraham problem.

Sol, a Jewish Bible scholar from Barnard's World, the author of *Moral Turning Points* and *Abraham's Dilemma*, has been deliberating for decades on what claim, if any, God had to demand from Abraham that he sacrifice his only legitimate son Isaac. An important issue for a further consideration of Sol's moral quandary is the fact that Abram, later renamed Abraham, originally lived in Ur of the Chaldees where people worshipped the ancient Mesopotamian pantheon of pagan gods, in particular the moon god Nanna.[3] Thus even if we agree that any god is an Other to a believer, the true God Yahweh who revealed Himself to Abram must have been the absolute Other who unlike other gods demanded not only worship but a personal bond based on mutual trust. The question Sol asks concerns the limits of Abraham's obedience to his new and absolutely other God and thus is a question about the acceptable form of a man-God relationship.

Abraham does not dispute God's commands but fulfils them. When God calls out to him "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (GENESIS 12: 1), he departs with his wife and his household heading off to the promised but unknown land of Canaan. What Sol notes in his reflections is that Abraham obeys, but he leaves out the latter's motivations. God enters into a covenant with Abraham making three promises to him: 1) the promise of a land of his own; 2) the promise of being made into a great nation, which is associated with the later announcement that Sarah, Abraham's barren ninety-year old wife, will bear him a male child; and 3) the promise that all the peoples of the Earth will be blessed through him. Although the promises are not fulfilled at once and Abraham has to persist in his faith for decades, eventually they all come to pass. Hence, when God puts his faith to a test commanding: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (GENESIS 22: 2), the patriarch, however agonizing his decision might be, obeys the Lord out of faith which is not a blind faith, but one well founded on a settled assurance and trust in the One who has never betrayed or failed him.

Brooding over the Abraham problem, Sol Weintraub cannot accept the old man's readiness to sacrifice his innocent child. As he says speaking to a rabbi, "I've had some experience with different ethical systems, but it's hard for me to understand one which began with the order to a father to slay his son" (H 272). And it does not matter to him that God stayed Abraham's hand at the critical

3) The Mesopotamian moon god was called Nanna in Sumerian, and Sin or Su'en in Akkadian.

moment, for he deems God must have known that Abraham was really ready to kill Isaac. In Sol's understanding, a God who demands bloody sacrifices of children is "a God turned malicious" (FH 237) who does not deserve human obedience. In the face of such a gross perversity humanity has to withdraw from the covenant with *God-the Other* for the cruel God has forfeited his right to human loyalty. And so Sol cries out to a voice in his dream: "Listen! There will be no more offerings, neither child nor parent. There will be no more sacrifices for anyone other than our fellow human. The time of obedience and atonement is past" (H 303). The bond with the divine Other has been broken and people have no longer any obligations to anyone but one another.

Even if, as Dan Simmons writes, "Finally, Weintraub had dealt with refusing all sacrifice, refusing any relationship with God except one of mutual respect and honest attempts at mutual understanding" (FH 150), his rebellion has worked for the old Gods whose multiple deaths history has seen. He may refuse his moral obligation to any deity he does not believe in but his real dilemma is concerned with another godlike Other that demands his attention and sacrifice, the AI powers of the Ultimate Intelligence Project "that humankind had constructed [...] and released [...] on the universe" (FH 150).

The thing is that Sol's Abraham problem is not theoretical but all too tangibly real. He and his wife Sarai[4] have been trying to deal with it ever since their only child, daughter Rachel, came back from archeological excavations at the Time Tombs on the planet Hyperion where she mysteriously developed the Merlin sickness, an anti-entropic aging disease. For twenty six years now, Sol has been watching her losing "memories with each day and hour that passed" (FH 89) "the woman ag[ing] backward to child, from child to infant" (FH 151). He, like Abraham, is not only to lose his only child, but he is also called to give it away as a sacrifice. For years he has been haunted by the same dream in which an immense Voice says to him: "Sol! Take your daughter, your only daughter Rachel, whom you love, and go to the world called Hyperion and offer her there as a burnt offering at one of the places of which I shall tell you" (H 250). And for years he has been adamantly refusing the idea of sacrificing human life to any God-like other. His resolve seems to be non-negotiable at first, but it is gradually weakened as once in a dream he can feel his daughter's "unspoken *yes*" (H 302) to the Other voice's call, and in a later dream, when he comes to Hyperion as a pilgrim, he hears his infant daughter's words, "Say yes, Daddy"

4) Sol's wife's name is not a coincidence. Sarai had been Abraham's wife's name before God changed it to Sarah (GENESIS 17:15).

(FH 237). It is also important that the voice of the unknown Other does not just wish obedience as a form of worship but keeps making a moral demand on Sol on account of a greater good of the whole universe. The Other not so much commands as pleads: 'Sol! You must listen well. The future of humankind depends upon your obedience in this matter" (H 251). Eventually, at the crucial moment, the Other Presence makes a concession that entirely redefines their relationship for it says, "Sol, listen," in a voice "modulated now so it did not boom from far above but almost whispered in his ear…the future of humankind depends upon your choice. Can you offer Rachel out of love, if not obedience?" (FH 237).

While he rejects the ethics of obedience to the Other, he is ready to approve the ethics of love if humanity and the non-human other meet half way. In the end, when the Tombs of Time open, he entrusts his only daughter to none else but the Shrike, the quintessential other, a "creature of death" (FH 491) with "steel thorns […] shimmering on finger-blades and scalpels rising from every joint" (FH 241). If the act is one of trust, Sol is not betrayed for adult Rachel comes back through the portal of time bringing herself as an infant now aging in the right way. An old man that he is, Sol will raise his daughter once again to adulthood in a world of the far future, at some other end of the time gate where humanity coexists with all kinds of others pursuing common goals.

Concluding, the ethics of embracing alterity in mutual trust that Dan Simmons promotes in *The Hyperion Cantos* may be impossible to adopt by humanity as it is today, but since the novels belong to the genre of speculative fiction, the author is not compelled by the imperative of immediate practical feasibility. What is appealing in Simmons' ethical reflection is the idea that moral justice is in us and that it is our gift given unconditionally to the other for eventually, as Derrida aptly says, "it is the experience of the other as other, the fact that I let the other be other, which presupposes a gift without restitution, without reappropriation and without jurisdiction" (DERRIDA 2002: 105).

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