Silence of the Idols: Appropriating the Myth of Sisyphus for Posthumanist Discourses

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Abstract

Both current and past analyses and critiques of transhumanist and posthumanist theories have had a propensity to cite the Greek myth of Prometheus as a paradigmatic figure. Although stark differences exist amongst the token forms of posthumanist theories and transhumanism, both theoretical domains claim promethean theory as their own. By first analyzing the appropriation of the myth in both posthumanism and transhumanism I show how the myth fails to be foundational to both camps simultaneously. I then introduce the Camusian *Myth of Sisyphus* as a competing analogy that ultimately serves as a myth better suited to address the posthumanist position by shifting away from humanist-laden dichotomies that are characteristic of transhumanist thought. I ultimately show that Sisyphus, as the 'absurd man' that Camus claims him to be, is himself the posthuman, thus serving as a more ideal foundational myth for posthumanism and preserving the importance of narrative in posthuman discourses. To conclude I show that the concept of Sisyphus as a posthuman icon has significance that reaches beyond narrative value to current ecological debates in posthumanist

1 Introduction

Discussions of both *transhumanism* and *posthumanism* are populated with references to the classical Greek promethean myth most commonly referenced from the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus (5th/6th century B.C.E). The myth is appropriated by both early posthumanists (Hassan 1977; Franssen 2014; Ferrando 2013; Herbrechter 2013; Welsch 2017) transhumanists (Bostrom 2005; Fuller 2013) alike in order to represent their respective positions. Posthumanists, most specifically Ihab Hassan, use the myth to signal the radical change of the concept of human as we begin to redefine agency beyond conventional humanist dichotomies (Franssen 2014). For transhumanists, Prometheus is an example of the ideal human agent, one who takes control of his being in order to rise beyond innate boundaries and better themselves with the ultimate move towards the supreme goal of the post-human. Both theories use the myth, but in very different ways.

In this paper, I argue that the myth of Prometheus, although an integral part of the genealogy of posthumanism, is no longer an appropriate analogy. In order to successfully accomplish this, I will begin by providing a brief discussion that aims to demarcate the differences between *posthumanism* and *transhumanism.* I will follow this section by laying out the promethean myth as well as discuss how it has and continues to be used in both in the various *posthumanist* and *transhumanist* discourses. In doing this I will show some of the insufficiencies of the myth as it has historically been used in posthumanist circles. Finally, and most importantly, I will argue that the Camusian *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) provides a better inflective narrative for posthumanist theorists who wish to move beyond the bounds of the innate humanist dichotomies found in the promethean myth (most specifically those of god/man and heaven/earth) as well as briefly show how the Sisyphean myth can be applied to the current ecological debates in posthumanist discourses.

2 The Other Humanisms

In order to better understand the appropriation of terms and the proper usages of
posthumanism and *transhumanism* I will use this sections as a means to give clarification.
I will give a brief overview of the anthropology of the positions given that the existing
literature has satisfactorily covered such (Fuller 2013; Sorgner 2014).

Although the two positions overlap in some areas, posthumanism and
transhumanism are contrasting views of human agency. Transhumanist scholar Steve
Fuller (2012) differentiates the two saying that "starkly put, posthumanism is
anti-humanist, while transhumanism is *ultra-humanist*" (Fuller, 2013, 40) .The
posthumanist understands humanity as having no privileged place amongst the other
existing species, thus the posthumanist argues for a greater humility and a normative
acceptance of their equal place with other lifeforms and nature (Fuller 2013; Sorgner
2014). Hence, posthumanism defies the standard conceptions that result from
conventional humanist philosophies that prize the otherwise exclusive rational powers of
humans, instead relegating the existence of the unique human cerebrum to nothing more
than evolutionary contingency (Fuller 2013; Meillassoux 2009; Morton 2012; Bogost
2012). As a result, posthumanism sees this contingency as reason to believe that the
evolutionary path that humanity is inevitably subject to will destroy any current
self-concept of what humanity is and the position it holds in the world. Hence, this
motivation that posthumanism understands as the reasons for moving beyond humanity
also has resonance for *transhumanism* which also aims to transcend the conception of
'human', but in a sense that contrasts starkly to that of posthumanism. However, it must
be noted that there are numerous definitions employed for posthumanism, in fact,
Francesca Ferrando identifies at least seven definitions (Ferrando 2013). This paper
however levies that of Hassan, a historical posthumanism. One where the anthropocentric
dichotomies that characterize the humanist tradition are blurred and the anthropocentrism

at its heart dissolves (Hassan 1977; see more specifically Franssen 2014).

The *ultra-humanist* conception that can be used to describe transhumanism is a result of the transhumanist emphasis on retaining humanity's privileged position above other species, but also to continue to reinforce this position through scientific and technological means that posthumanism believes to be a nonstarter given the always already dissolving of humanist divisions. Harnessing science and technology, according to transhumanists, will allow agents to evolve beyond the biological constraints of natural selection. The ultimate goal of transhumanism is to arrive at a post-human state; this, unlike in posthumanism, cannot be accomplished by conceding to humanity's self-misconceptions of superiority, but in embracing this deterministic position and leveraging our tools and our sciences to fortify this foundation and use it to continue rising beyond physical limitations.

In all, this posthumanism understands humanist positions, including transhumanism, philosophies of dissolution, that is, the bifurcations upon which they are built *have become* intermingled and inseparable. It argues that the uniqueness of humanity's higher cognitive capacities is nothing other than a product of contingent evolution that will otherwise become a burden as the negative environmental consequences that our actions have wrought come to bear down on us. Likewise, posthumanism argues that it is impossible for us to have any real conception of advancement in evolutionary decent, there is no reason according to posthumanists to think that evolution will develop improvements in descendants instead of different and otherwise contingent adaptive traits. It is important to note however that posthumanism, although differing significantly from the assertions of transhumanism, is not transhumanism's negation. Rather, *bioconservatives* can take the place of transhumanism's negation, asserting fears of transhumanism's technological accelerationist program as dangerous. They too cite the Promethean myth, not as a narrative of human supremacy and its relation to technology,

but as an forewarning, a tale of potential eschatology (Briggle 2014; Keulartz and Schermer 2014; Herold 2016; Kozubek 2016).

Transhumanism on the other hand understands the failures of our historical lineage as a work-in-progress towards development that will ultimately solve the problems that it created. Similarly, this will be the result of the leveraging of our unique brain's higher functioning capability and its ability to transcend beyond the confines of biological evolution by harnessing our tools of science and technology, perhaps even to become something entirely non-biological such as silicon-based agents

Part 1: Myth as Narrative

3   Prometheus Unbound

Accounted by Aeschylus as the only titan to be spared damnation after the fabled Clash of the Titans, Zeus deemed Prometheus worthy of mercy given his critical role in helping the Olympian gods win the war against their forebears. After ascension to the Olympian throne, Zeus, whom Prometheus aided in winning the war, became determined to destroy the entire human race. Abhorred by the tyrant's decision, Prometheus felt pity on the humans and determined to help them, stole the secret of fire from Olympus and brought it down to humans. He became their mentor, helping them transcend their ignorance by giving them the wisdom and tools by which they can better themselves. Angered upon discovering his deception, Zeus punished Prometheus to everlasting torment. Tied to a pillar, he was doomed to have his liver eaten by an eagle and having it re-grow every day so that it may be eaten again.

Different versions of the myth exist, one version coming from Plato's Protagoras (380 BCE) as well as Hesiod (8th Century) (Plato 1997; Hesiod 1959). Although these versions recount the unfolding of Zeus' anger against humanity differently, they are common in that ultimately Prometheus enlightens humans with his gifts and is

consequentially charged with theft by the gods. The Platonic version however provides perhaps the most relevant narrative for human privilege in the world and among nonhumans. Plato's narrative of Prometheus is one in which he gifts the sidelined humanity the with the stolen gifts of fire, wisdom and other qualities of a divine nature that made them superior to other lifeforms (Plato 1997, 757). Although in the beginning they were weaker [i.e., incomplete] "in every way" to other beasts, it was only after Zeus' intervention in which he gifted humanity with other qualities, they were able to better collectively order themselves (Plato 1997, 757). We can already begin to see how the Platonic version predisposes the transhumanist to its adoption, as Prometheus is the transhumanist bestowing the 'incomplete' humans with gifts of the gods, of dominance and divinity (over other 'beasts').

3.1   Promethean Posthumanism

In his 1977 paper *Prometheus as performer: Toward a posthumanist culture?* Ihab Hassan draws from the example of Prometheus as the spark that initiated posthumanism saying that

Posthumanist culture is a performance in progress, and their symbolic nexus is Prometheus. Prometheus is himself the figure of a flawed consciousness struggling to transcend such divisions as the One and the Many, Cosmos and Culture, the Universal and the Concrete; with regard to posthumanism itself, the most relevant aspect of the Promethean dialectic concerns Imagination and Science, Myth and Technology, Earth and Sky, two realms tending to one (Hassan, 1977, 838).

Hassan argues that Prometheus is the key to posthumanism because he transcends the boundaries of human definitions. He both makes humans and changes them beyond any definable dichotomies that are crucial to humanist thought, thus pushing beyond the boundaries of the "five hundred years of humanism" that is ultimately "coming to an end" (Hassan, 1977, 843).

The dichotomies that are characteristic of enlightenment humanist thought, although changing over time, include such distinctions as mind/body, rational/irrational, human/nonhuman, object/subject, and of course the anthropocentric superiority of humankind (Wolfe 2009). Hassan argues that it is these *modes of being* that will ultimately dissolve as the arts and sciences blur distinctions and become integrated into the fabric of being. Ultimately, the posthumanism project seeks to move beyond the conventional binaries that characterize humanist thought (Hassan 1977; Wolfe 2009). They draw upon the myth of Prometheus as a means to base this form of theoretical rebellion on, as Prometheus himself, breaking his masters' laws, seeks to bring the means and wisdom by which he can help beings to transcend and redefine themselves into something foreign and previously unknowable.

However, early conceptions of the promethean narrative and its application to posthumanism does not account for the now existing differentiation of posthumanism and transhumanism. Each of these now starkly contrasting positions were not clearly defined in the early literature that accounted the appropriation of Prometheus as an ideal of transcendence and change. Thus, the promethean myth is existent in modern discussions of posthumanism and transhumanism because early literature did not account for the now permeating gap between the two, hence, Prometheus is an artifact of a now nonexistent union of philosophies. It is for this very reason that Prometheus, although anthropologically significant to the two philosophies must be revaluated.

It is the aim of the remainder of this paper to show how Prometheus should remain nothing other than an artifact of posthumanist discussions while still holding narrative value to transhumanism. Likewise, arguments will be put forth to why the Camusian *Myth of Sisyphus* is a more suitable narrative to appropriate for posthumanist analyses.

Although overlapping thought can be found between transhumanism and the various forms of philosophical and cultural posthumanism (Ferrando 2013; Sorgner 2014), stark contrasts exist separating the two domains, particularly in the perspective of humanist thought and the understanding of the traditional human subject in socio-cultural and technological contexts (Hayles 2003; Hughes 2010; More 2013). The transhumanist thinker is part of a larger group, one that believes in the necessity, and in some cases the moral imperative, to use emerging technologies such as biotechnology and nanotechnology to better the human subject with the ultimate goal of transcendence into the post-human (Bendel 2016; Bostrom 2005; Fukuyama 2002; Gray 2001; Hook 2004; Milburn 2002). The transhumanist emphasis on the importance of technology as a necessary means by which humans can be enhanced is one of the main differences between transhumanist thought and posthumanism. Nonetheless, the transhumanist appropriation of the promethean myth puts far less, if any, emphasis on the dialectic of anti-humanist dichotomy, with greater focus on the actions of Prometheus by bringing humans the means by which they can better themselves, changing themselves willingly through the adoption of novel technologies.

The example of the promethean enhancements is implicitly seen in most transhumanist literature, much of which appears to have overly spiritual sentiments despite its proponents claims to be rooted deeply in purely scientific and technological advancements. In an interview Google Director of Engineering Ray Kurzweil stated that:

We'll have nanobots, blood cell-sized devices that have powerful computers in them, and communication devices, and it will all be on a wireless (unintelligible) network, it'll be on the Internet. And we can have billions of them in our brain . . . We'll be able to send them in without surgery, and not just to one spot in the brain, but to billions of locations, and have them interact with our biological neurons and really evolve into a

hybrid of biological and non-biological intelligence by the late 2020s (Kurzweil 2006).

Thus, Kurzweil is drawing on the use of nanotechnology to augment our biological bodies to create a sort of "hybrid", an in-between. In doing so, he sees the use of such advanced technologies as natural, as part of the necessary evolutionary pathways that we as a species find ourselves.

Similar thoughts can be seen in K. Eric Drexler's *Engines of Creation2.0* (2006) which was the first full length exposition of the benefits and costs of molecular manufacturing. This means of production can create objects by arranging the atoms one-by-one, thus strictly controlling the byproducts of production as well as the tolerances of the final product (Drexler 2006). As a result, molecular manufacturing can usher in an age of what Drexler calls 'radical abundance', thus changing the basic conceptions of economics and ultimately the *mode of being* in which humanity understands itself (Drexler 2013).

Like the promethean gifts, molecular manufacturing can radically shift the definition of *being* away from traditional humanist notions towards something similar to that of the *posthumanist* post-human, in the same way that posthumanism interprets the promethean myth to signify. However, like Kurzweil, Drexler falls into the anthropocentric pit, seeing the radical new technology as solely a means by which humanity, as it is understood in the humanist sense, can better itself. The evolving technology leads itself to this near inevitable end. As humanity has always done, the manipulations of basic matter into tools for use continues, but only with more advanced materials and tools. The emphasis is not necessarily on the new way humanity must redefine its *being-in-the-world* (Dreyfus, 1991; see also Heidegger, 1962, 12: 84; Wheeler, 2011), but rather how humanity can continue being what it is but with a technological shift that may prove to be far too dramatic for traditional humanistic definitions to remain.

In such cases we can see how the lines begins to blur as the sharp distinctions of

the classical humanist dichotomies begin to dissolve. The distinction between man/machine begins to fade as gradation becomes the norm and demarcation becomes grey (Shakespeare 2012; G. Jones and Whitaker 2012). Like Prometheus' use of fire and tools to bring humankind a new mode of being, these technologies are seen by transhumanist thinkers as the means by which the human individual can become the technological post-human. However, the anthropomorphic focus on enhancement, is unmistakably humanist, greatly diverging from the anti-humanist sentiment that characterizes posthumanist thought. Each transhumanist praises the human-centered control over her domain, seeking the means by which to harness technology in order to improve and enhance her nature (Sandel 2009).

The promethean myth is thus fitting for the transhumanist position. Transhumanists focus on the human and understand the human in traditional humanist frameworks. Although they acknowledge the inevitable greying of dichotomies, they simultaneously emphasize these distinctions. In doing so, they, like in the myths of Prometheus, accept the means of enhancement with an understanding that such enhancements are integrally linked to humanist dichotomies, "the (human) subject manipulates the object; science takes control over nature; the mind engineers the body - which is nothing but an instrument" (Franssen, 2014, **79**). In sum, the transhumanist position *is* humanist, but only insofar as it holds onto many dichotomies characteristic of humanist thought as well as the speciesism that posthumanism rejects.

3.3 Sisyphus Lifts Prometheus

It cannot be denied that there exists an importance of the promethean myth to posthumanism, one that stems from the genealogy of posthumanism. However, I contend that although such a genealogical account cannot be denied, the continued appropriation of the analogy of Prometheus to that of posthumanist culture fails to address many of the embedded humanist dichotomies that are present in the promethean myths. In an attempt

to preserve the importance of narrative in posthumanism, I thus propose that a new, more fitting myth be adopted by posthumanist theorists, that of the Camusian Sisyphus. In order to argue why the Camusian myth is better suited, and given this is the first time the Sisyphean myth is being discussed with this intent in context of the posthumanism discourse, I will recount the myth in its original form as well as Camus' account. I will show how his interpretation is strongly representative of the posthumanism position (although he does not position himself as a posthumanist) by emphasizing the lack of conventional humanist dichotomies thus showing how Sisyphus represents the ideal posthuman transformation as well as how Sisyphus comes to show the importance of what I have come to know as the *artifact of being*, a concept that should take precedent in posthumanism discourses.

Readers should also take note on the hermeneutic investigation that is to follow. The existence of posthumanism as a discourse followed Camus' death. As such, it would be highly anachronistic to attribute his philosophy or even the Myth of Sisyphus to being specifically posthumanist. In fact, scholars argue that Camus' work is thoroughly humanist in nature (i.e., Decker 2010; Wadlow 2013). However, Von Hassel (2017) argues that Camus' conception of theoretical rebellion – of which this paper levies – leads Camus to assert a 'new humanism' of "solidarity and freedom" (Von Hassel 2017). As such, this 'new humanism' – although still thoroughly humanist in the traditional sense in Van Hassel's paper – can be be interpreted as being distinctively posthumanist in nature. The remainder of this paper aims to do just that.

The Myth of Sisyphus

The historical record of the myth of Sisyphus is no less diverse then that of the Promethean myth. Various authors of antiquity make use of the narrative, either in their works of art or literature (e.g., Apollodorus 1921; Pausanias 1918; Theognis 1931; Homer 1900; Müller 1841). The Camusian interpretation itself is mostly metaphorical rather than

a sincere historical account of the myth as such, however the aim of this paper is not necessarily to derive a hermeneutics from a sincere 'historical' account of Sisyphus (there are many), but to focus primary on the Camusian myth *as such* (for a in-depth discussion of the historical and metaphorical interpretation by Camus see Collard 2002). The general story, pieced together here by both Homer and Apollodorus, is as follows:

Sisyphus, first king of Corinth, was known as perhaps the craftiest of all monarchs. Also regarded as a tyrant who took great pleasure in killing people protected under the custom of *xenia* - the Greek custom of protecting foreign visitors - which was considered sacred and under the protection of Zeus. Ultimately, on account of his contempt of divine law and hubris, believing himself to be above the gods, he was condemned to eternal punishment; forced to carry a boulder up a hill, only to have it fall down to the roots upon reaching the precipice (Homer 1900, 1969; Apollodorus 1921). The punishment was intended to torture Sisyphus by forcing him into an eternity of meaninglessness (Camus 1942).

The myth, being hermeneutically diverse, lacks a specificity in many of the authors' works that is pertinent to a posthumanist hermeneutics of the Sisyphean myth. Classical interpretations suggest that his punishments were the result of his attainment of immortality by chaining Zeus' hitman Thanatos (Death). Through his wit in entrapping death, the universes divine laws instituted by the gods – in this case the ability to die (the dichotomy of life/death) – ceased to function. As such, the dead, diseased and mangled could walk the earth anew, and Sisyphus freed himself from the Gods (Theognis 1931, see in partiuclar 699-718; Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 119 as found in Müller 1841). Although, we can judiciously suggest an interpretation that shift the punishment of attaining immortality (a distinguishing quality of the god/human distinction) towards one of a refusal to die. Theognis suggests this specifically, that it was not immortality for which Sisyphus was punished, but the refusal to die, the suspension of the life/death and infinite/finite

dynamics of natural law of the heaven/earth dichotomy.

The Absurd Hero

The Camusian interpretation of the story is unique. Camus considers Sisyphus to be what he calls the 'absurd hero'. The absurd hero is one who rejects suicide, both in its physical (literally killing oneself) and metaphysical manifestations (adopting religious faith), and acknowledges the objective meaninglessness of existence yet rebels against the apparent futility and creates their own meaning. Camus analyzes the psychology, the thought processes of Sisyphus as he engages in his endless task saying:

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. (Camus, 1942, 121)

Camus argues that the most tortuous moment for Sisyphus is when he becomes truly conscious of his eternal fate, yet Camus argues that even when this consciousness of Sisyphus' absurd condition emerges, a conscious rebellion can be cultivated that can ultimately aid him in combatting his condition saying that "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (Camus, 1942, 121), this is what I call the *will to transcend*, to synthesize meaning from nothingness and to redefine one's *mode of being* into something that cannot, at that time, be recognized. Yet, this cannot emerge de nihilo, rather, the will is the product of his consciousness, the self-understanding of his condition.

Hence, even in the path of an absurd condition, the absurd hero continues on nonetheless. It is the consciousness itself, the realization that life is a priori meaningless that frees Sisyphus from the bonds set upon him by the gods. His acceptance to his fate allows him to move beyond its limits, to transcend it and thus redefine himself entirely,

thus Camus concludes of Sisyphus that:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (Camus, 1942, 123)

Sisyphus was punished by the gods because they represent the continuous reinforcement of the dichotomy of man/god. The gods are speciest in the way they act and impose definition on Sisyphus (and thus all mankind), likewise Sisyphus understand himself in relation to the gods that define him, and thus he defines himself in like manner. They sought to punish Sisyphus with the most tormentous task imaginable for his belief that he was above his certain mode of being i.e., human. However, it is through this very punishment itself that Sisyphus' *will to transcend* emerges that permits him to erase that humanist dichotomy, to remove its importance by devaluing one of its disjuncts i.e., gods in their relation to man. In doing so Sisyphus literally "negates the gods" and this likewise makes Sisyphus something more than just a man or a god, something that cannot be obviously demarcated.

The *Artifacts of Being*

Posthumanism focuses heavily on the entire shift away from any humanist definitions and the dualist anthropocentric traditions that have persisted in western culture since Plato onwards. Yet some posthumanists acknowledge the existent agents that are the subjects of such transition even given their rejection of the subject/object dichotomy (e.g., Mol 2002; Law and Mol 1995)[1] . In doing so they make a philosophical error of ignoring the *being* of the agents that become redefined. There is something unique about the individual or the population that changes, this uniqueness is preserved, at least in some

degree, within the novel *mode of being*, regardless of the mode. This uniqueness is what I call the *artifact of being* ('artifact' is employed here with a meaning of 'risiduality' or 'what remains' rather than 'artificiality'). This artifact of being I contend to be the conscious rebellion against the absurdity of existence; meaning the rebellious awakening of consciousness that combats the absurd and seeks to transcend the current *mode of being* i.e., the *will to transcend*. This artifact remains beyond the threshold of redefinition into the novel *mode of being*, i.e., the posthumanism post-human. Sisyphus is an exemplar of this. It is the conscious awakening of his predicament that could lead him to despair - as the gods intended with their punishment - or, as Camus contends, can lead to an acknowledgment of absurdity and thus rebellion against it. This rebellion persists with Sisyphus for eternity, it is preserved and serves as a foundational part of his posthumanist post-human identity even given its artifice status.

In sum, in all posthumanist definitions of an agent (for those that provide one), there must exist an acknowledgment of the *artifact of being* which persists. As in the case with the humanist definitions of man, this artifact is that which is central to his existence, the rebellious consciousness as it emerges when conscious of absurd existence. A liberation from humanist concepts of man 'imposed' by the gods, accomplished by self-redefinition through rebellion. The artifact of the previous self, the dichotomous self of the mind/body, becomes meaningless insofar as they are no longer emphasized, instead, the artifact of being is essential to posthumanism, it is the seed that is kept, but built upon and serves as the principal catalyst for his redefinition into a posthumanist post-human status of being. It is the collective consciousness that is itself the will to transcend, but only when changed through willful rebellion. Sisyphus, is paradigmatic of this transcendence. His rebellion against the gods, the dichotomies of mind/body, animate/inanimate and man/earth are dissolved. The rebellious *will to transcend* must first be present, once cultivated but the individual or the enmeshed whole of assemblages,

changes the subject into something beyond the subject/object distinction. Sisyphus, as Camus sees him, becomes something utterly unrecognizable to his creators, to the gods, he is utterly happy, he is post-human (in the sense that early posthumanism conceives of).

Part 2: Myth as Representation

This paper has thus far aimed to accomplish the following goals: (1) to show that the anthropological history of transhumanism and posthumanism is blurred and not clearly defined, (2) to give a clear definition of modern conceptions of posthumanism and transhumanism, (3) to show how the myth of Prometheus exists as a narrative analog for both transhumanism and posthumanism on account of their common origin, and finally (4) to both introduce and argue why the Camusian Sisyphus acts as a more suitable analog for Posthumanism. This section, and the remainder of this paper aims to extend beyond arguments of both genealogy and suitability, instead offering interpretive accounts of how the Camusian Sisyphus represents posthumanist debates regarding ecological impacts.

4   One with His Rock

Much of posthumanism's contention regarding the displacement of the 'human' from the superior humanist pedestal is a consequence of its realization that there must be an inclusive account of phenomenal experience that goes beyond solely that of humans. Thus, posthumanists shift their understanding of how humans encounter and experience the world in an attempt to include how other beings do so. Hence, one ought not to understand the posthumanist position as an exclusion of the human-world encounter, but instead a diversification of world-views that includes the human as an unprivileged, but equal member.

By a similar token, posthumanism accounts for the heterogeneous phenomenologies that exist in the uniquely human-world encounter. The differing social, cultural, ethnic and economic experiences that characterize and influence certain human

experiences are accounted, just as they are in humanist thought. However, many posthumanists adopt an object-oriented ontology (OOO) that extends beyond this human-centered inclusion of variation to include that *for* all beings and their unique degree of phenomenological experience of their existence and position in it (Harman 2002; Morton 2009, 2013).

By a similar token, Timothy Morton (2016; 2012) and his theory of *dark ecology* and the related concept of the 'mesh' provide the basis on which the Camusian Sisyphus idealizes the OOO of posthumanist thought. The initial Sisyphean disconnect between *the man* and *the rock* exemplifies a clear symmetry with Morton's contention of ecological literature regarding the need for a convergence of an understanding between man and nature saying that:

Ecological writing keeps insisting that we are "embedded" in nature. Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being. Due to the properties of the rhetoric that evokes the idea of a surrounding medium, ecological writing can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society. It is a small operation, like tipping over a domino...Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration. (Morton, 2009, 4-5)

Camus similarly illustrates this bifurcation between nature and Sisyphus saying:

[. . .] one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it, and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a

few moments toward lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain. (Camus, 1942, 120-121

The account clearly separates the world that Sisyphus finds himself in as something wholly separate, external, and in this case, in opposition to his being. If we take this part of the Sisyphean myth as the part of sole import, then Sisyphus is nothing other than a humanist icon whose existence is in contrast to the world; gods, the mountain and the stone are unique phenomenologies that are at best unimportant and not considered, or at worst nonexistent to him. However, the once inanimate and unimportant facets of the world around him come alive and position themselves as fundamental parts to him, and him to them. Sisyphus' conscious awakening, his *will to transcend* allows him to understand his interconnectedness with his world-encounter, he is happy with his rock. He does not seek to understand the stone, its compositions, he does not overcome it with tools, but rather he goes through a self-transcendence beyond the rock, but in doing so becomes closer to it, "His rock *is* a thing" which enables him to "silence *all* the idols" and permit "the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up," not just those of privileged humanity (Camus, 1942, 123 italics added).

This newfound connection with his new world, his rock and that mountain is what makes Sisyphus posthuman rather than simply post-human. He engages and gains a new understanding of his being-in-the-world as the interconnectedness of man and nature are made manifest. Morton (2012) describes this phenomenon as the 'mesh' stating that:

All life forms are the mesh, and so are all the dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too, because natural selection

implies extinction. (Morton, 2012, 29)

Both death and life according to the concept of the mesh are inexorably linked to one another, each influencing and augmenting the other. Sisyphus, by a similar token:

[. . .] returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling. (Camus, 1942, 123)

Sisyphus, in his realization that the concept of 'human' and all associated notions of uniqueness and consequential superiority over all other modes is nothing other than a human construct and not the result of any cosmological or evolutionary necessity. It is upon this insight, when Sisyphus contextualizes the various modes of being, that he is able to both appreciate and truly see the authentic mesh of interconnectedness and pluralization of various phenomenologies. And he understands for the first time not only his being-in-the-world, but that "Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world" and that he is neither superior or inferior to that world, but a part of a plurality of modes of structuring the world (Camus, 1942, 123).

The primary dichotomies that are most presently dissolved in the Sisyphean myth here are those of god/man and heaven/earth. It is the responsibility of potential future research projects to determine to further, if possible, levy the myth of Sisyphus as a narrative tool to erase all the traditional humanist dichotomies and show how the Sisyphean myth is indeed a more suitable inflective narrative for posthumanism.

5   Conclusion

The promethean myth has served an important narrative role in both transhumanism and posthumanism philosophies. However, I have attempted to show that, in fact, the myth

does not accurately represent both discourses in the way their proponents intend. The inherent dualism and anthropocentricity of transhumanist theory makes the similar dualistic promethean myth suitable as an explanatory narrative. In like manner, the anti-dualistic, impartial and transcendent discussions that are distinctive of posthumanism do not make the dualistic promethean myth appropriate as an analog despite its historical importance to posthumanism. In order to preserve the importance of explanatory narratives to posthumanism I proposed that the Camusian *Myth of Sisyphus* offers a more representative inflective narrative that can be appropriated in future posthumanist discourses. In doing so, I showed that a particular version of the Sisyphean myth was free from the anthropocentric and dualistic incompatibilities found in the Promethean myth. Additionally, I showed that not only is Sisyphus the ideal representation of the posthumanist post-human, but that with closer observation of Camus' interpretation it is obvious that a better understanding of posthumanism as whole can be inferred. Concepts such as the *will to transcend* and the importance of the *artifacts of being* were introduced as well as their import to further discussions of posthumanism. Ultimately, more work is required to tease out the particularlities of the Sisyphean myth and its applicability as a posthumanist narrative. The legth restrictions of an article of this form limit the lengths to which this demonstration can take place. As such, further research is required to determine the continued suitability of the Sisyphean myth to dialogues of these domains, however, it is my position that Sisyphus, in relation to the promethean myth, offers a more suitable narrative foundation for posthumanism.

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Notes

[1]Graham Harman (2016) categorized Annmarie Mol and John Law's ontological program as succinctly falling within the camp of New Materialism (Harman 2016). New Materialism, although not the posthumanism of Hassan, nonetheless is one of the at least seven ways of defining posthumanism.