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Christ and the Posthuman: An Attempt to Solve the Mystery of Humanity in *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077*

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Abstract

In the three Cyberpunk texts, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Alita: Battle Angel*,

many posthuman values challenge humanity, as these new values pertaining to posthuman

settings offer values that may conflict with humanity as we know it. For example, seeing the

human body as something to be modified at will to fulfill certain ideals or desires, is a prevalent

value one can observe in *Cyberpunk 2077*. In *Blade Runner 2049*, there is an emphasis on

materialistic values that provide the basis for the idea that transhumanism can be used by

institutions to establish political and economic dominance in society, or as a means to exploit

labor. In addition, one can perceive an overly individualistic society in *Alita: Battle Angel*. A

Christian perspective can holistically explain what it means to be human in terms of the

application, the essence, and the form of humanity that *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*,

and *Cyberpunk 2077* explore.
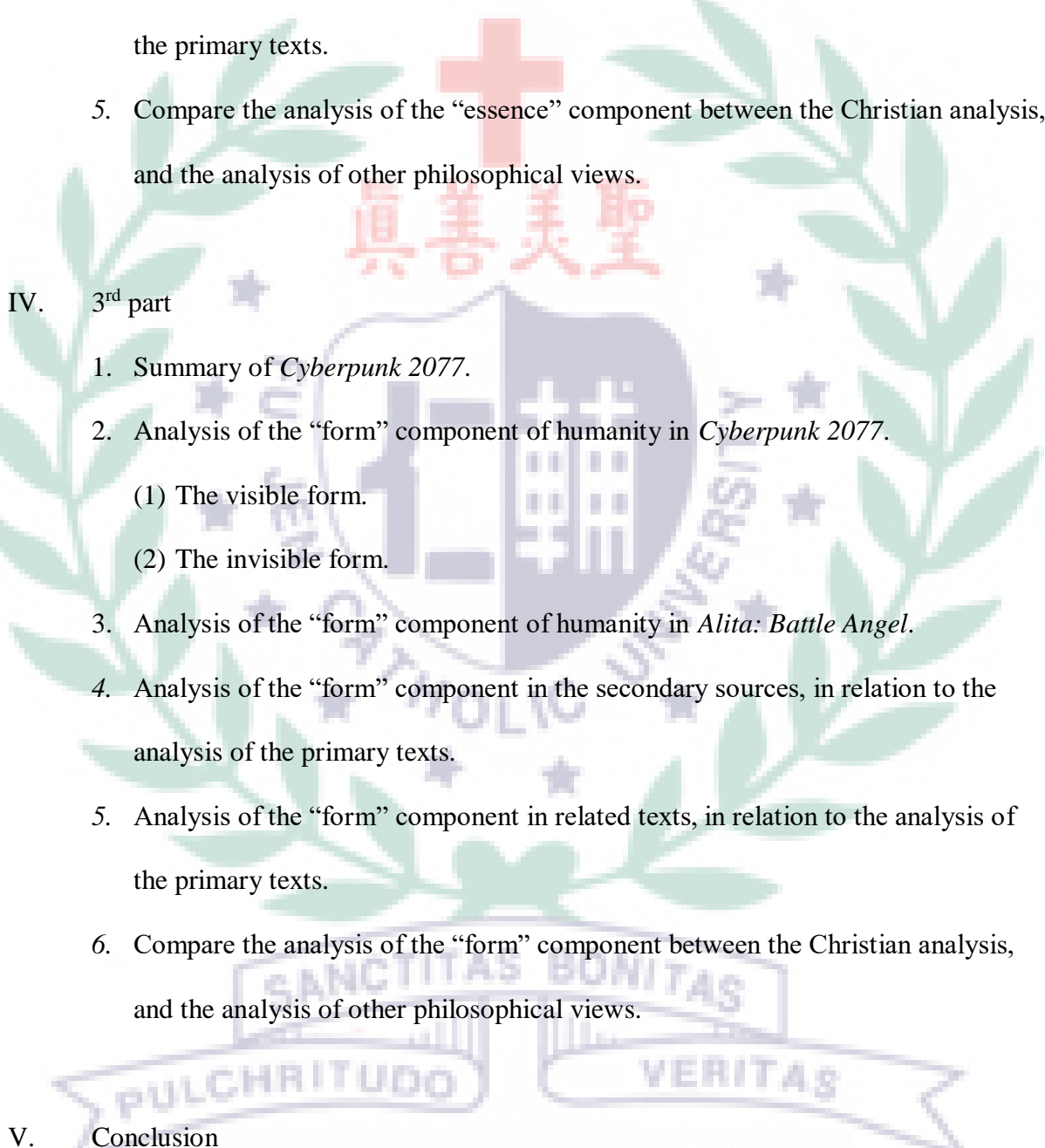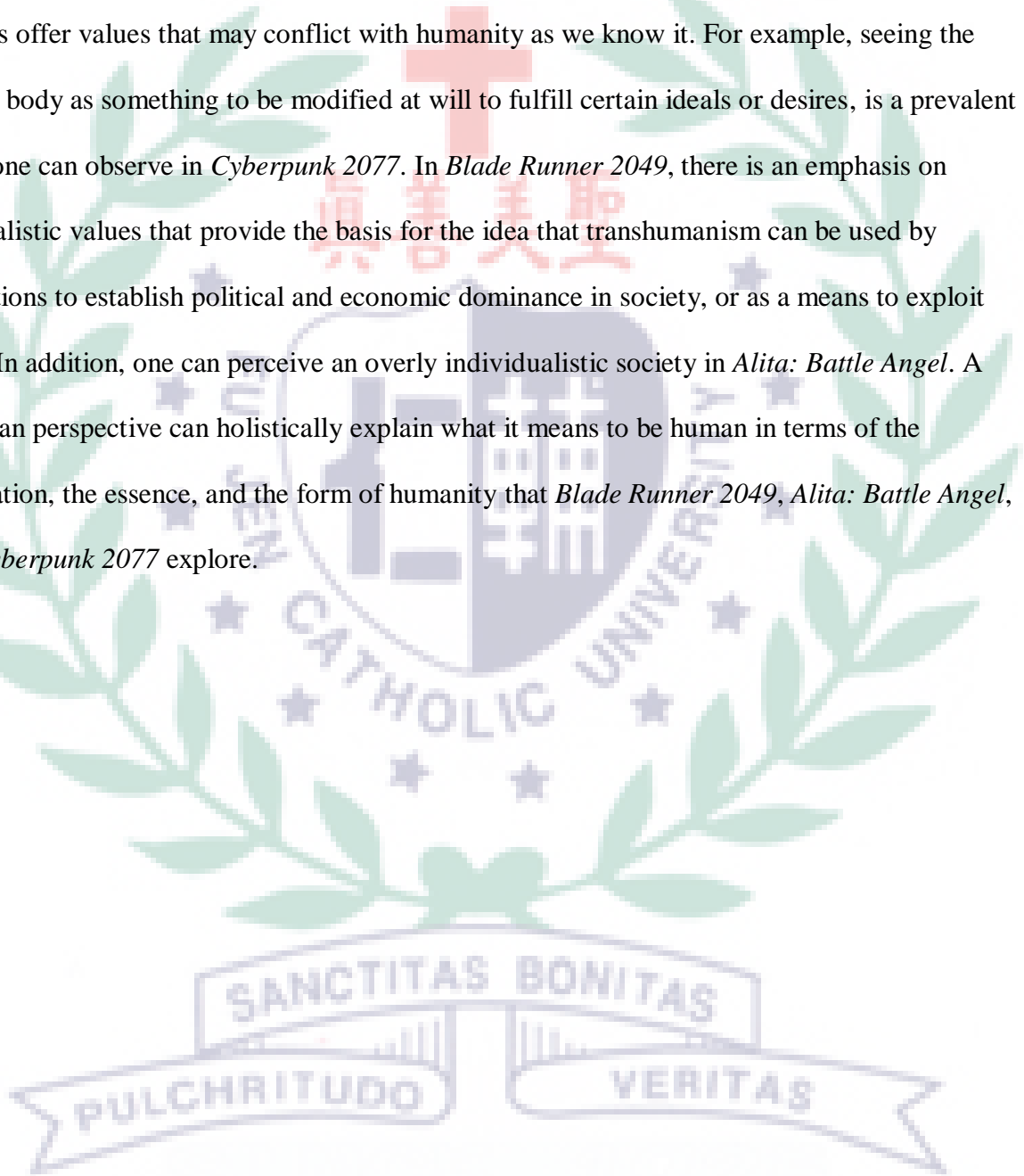
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4. Discuss the significance of the success of the Christian faith in terms of defining humanity, in retaining three important human values that White describes as "the inalienable substance of human rights and the genesis of society and law" (75).
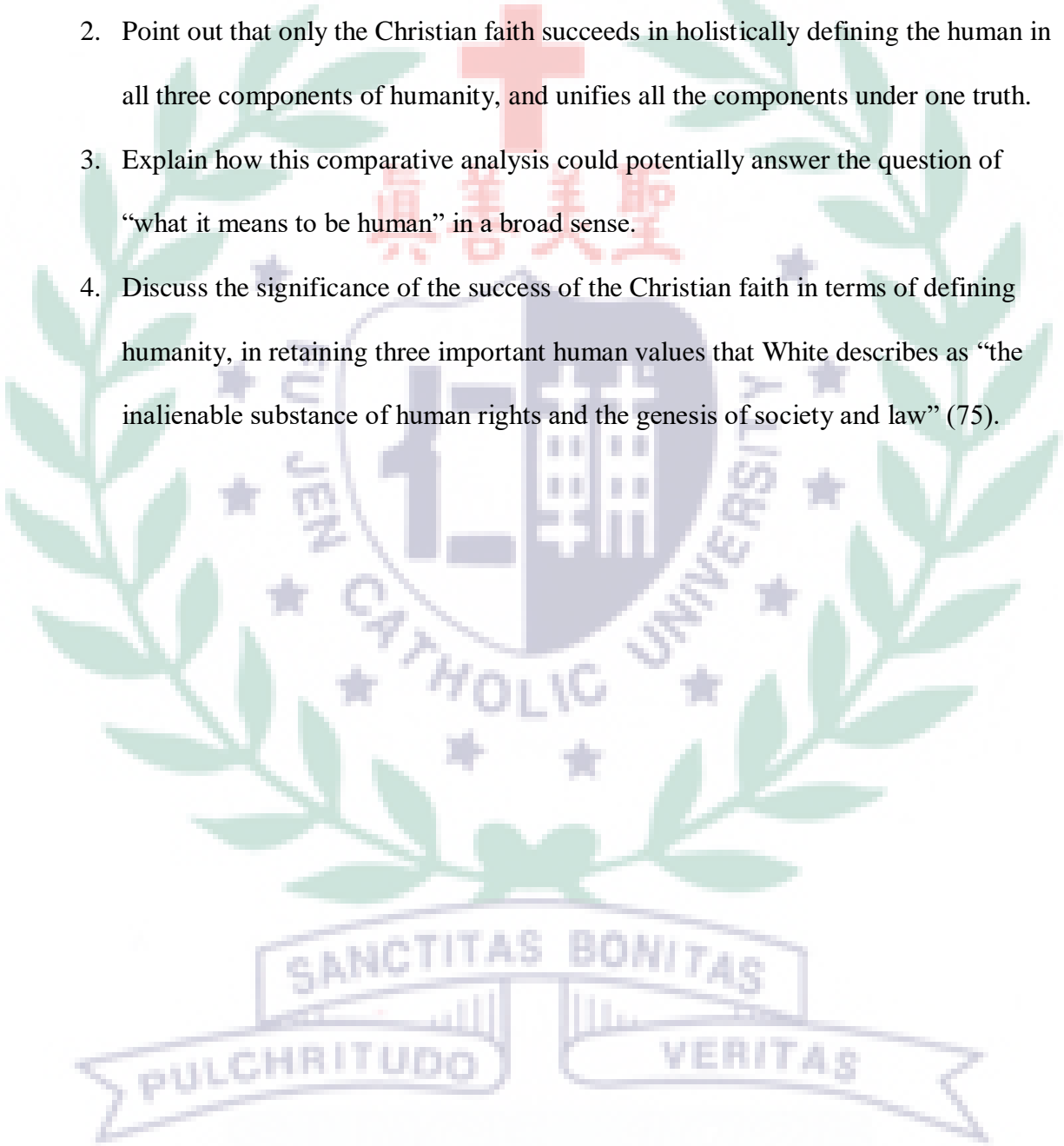
Introduction

Many of the challenges to the ontological integrity of humanity that one can observe in the Cyberpunk genre are present today although they are not as severe. The rise of materialism as a prevalent value in society is at the heart of the potential of phenomena that are present today to fuel the conflict between essential human values and some posthuman values that one can observe in *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077*. These contemporary phenomena include the inseparableness of many technologies in peoples' lives, the widening wealth gap that one can see in many economies, and the emergence of reproduction-based societies that may cause people to put emphasis on material benefits rather than spiritual depth. As humanity continues to advance in the future, in the aspects of technological incorporations in peoples' lives, the economic disparities among socio-economic classes, and social structures that are in correlation with technological advancements and the state of a dominant economic model, it is likely that these challenges will eventually evolve into the posthuman phenomena that Cyberpunk science fiction depicts, that conflict with "humanity" as we know it, in which the authenticity of the humane and statutes of morality are manifest. That said, it has become increasingly important to define humanity in a way that provides a sustainable foundation for the existence of humanity that protects valuable aspects of human identity such as human rights, human dignity, and the reverence for human life; and in a way that successfully differentiates humans from machines, in order to preserve human identity. A Christian perspective can holistically explain what it means to be human in terms of the application, the essence, and the form of humanity that *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077* explore.

Outline

In the research paper, I will discuss the three components of humanity ─ The application, the essence, and the form, in *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077* respectively. I will also examine the two important questions of differentiation and sustainability in defining humanity during my comparative analysis of philosophical views. Following this section is the literature review, in which I outline the material I will use in the textual analysis, and after that I discuss the methodology that describes in detail how I develop my argument in the textual analysis. In the textual analysis, I will introduce the three components of humanity by examining how *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077* depict humanity, then I will comparatively analyze various philosophical theories that pertain to the aspects of humanity that the primary texts depict, with the Christian view of humanity that I describe. Finally, I will summarize the results of the discussions of each section to form a meaningful conclusion to the discussion of how humanity should be defined on the basis of the three components, for the purposes that I mention in the introduction.

Literature Review

In Chris Lay's (2021) "*Cyberpunk 2077* as Philosophy: Balancing the (Mystical) Ghost in the (Transhuman) Machine," He examines different theories that respond to the problem of the loss of identity, including the ship of Theseus puzzle proposed by the Greek historian Plutarch, and Derek Parfit's theories of the continuity of identity and of identity being indeterminate (10). Parfit's theories are used as solutions for the ship of Theseus puzzle, while Lay includes instances from the game to demonstrate situations that reflect these problems or phenomenon, and show the game's stance on these matters. In part two, Lay offers many views of how transhuman enhancement may diminish or conflict with humanity, but may also simply be part of human nature. In part three, Lay describes the transhuman corporatism in *Cyberpunk 2077*, and the concept of a reproduction-based society, as well as the Buddhist philosophy of the pacification of desire as resistance. Finally, Lay provides a view of Christian mysticism as resistance to the selfish individualism seen in the transhuman corporatism in *Cyberpunk 2077*: "Ultimately, Weil is motivated by a Christian mysticism and regards interpersonal relation as a necessary way to meet the "needs of the soul" and to combat what she calls social "uprootedness" – a spiritual displacement caused by selfish individualism and the desires for money and prestige" (20).

Lay raises questions about the loss of identity and humanity due to transhumanism, and in relation, the excessive consumerism and materialism created by the reproduction-based society, that is in correspondence with the transhuman corporatism in *Cyberpunk 2077*. Lay uses many instances from the story of the game, and other features, to provide examples of the phenomenon that is discussed, and generally agrees with most skeptical views of transhumanism, and related narratives, while providing some spiritual aspects with Buddhist philosophy and

Christian mysticism. I will use some of Lay's analysis to support some of my claims, and to provide context and reference for my own analysis of *Cyberpunk 2077*. I will examine many of the philosophical theories provided in this paper, and point out some of the problems in these theories as well as the parts I find to be problematic in Lay's interpretation of the events in *Cyberpunk 2077* in relation to the theories that he applies for the analysis of these events. And I will also use the philosophical theories provided for comparison with the Christian view that I will provide based on my interpretation of *The Bible*.

In "Prosthetic Gods and Cyberpunk: A Comparative Study of *Blade Runner 2049* and *Alita*," Zara Rizwan and Zeenat Shahid (2020) argue that transhumanism is motivated by neurotic desires, and not by a good cause, to become prosthetic gods, in order to gain control over one's own life and others, by using Freud's theory. The concept of the Ego and Super Ego are introduced in Freud's theory (5). Both authors aver that in this process, the rift between the Ego and the Super Ego disappear, resulting in a lack of morality, by making "happiness" one's ultimate goal (6). Rizwan and Shaheed use themes and events from both *Blade Runner 2049* and *Alita: Battle Angel* to provide examples of the situations that they mention, and also to support their view on transhumanism. In the conclusion, both authors state that "going beyond human makes us less human and more machine and we lose our sense of humanity" (11) and interpret the cyborg Alita, and the replicant K, as prosthetic gods, going "beyond the concept of humanism and defy all the rules of religion and humanity" (11).

This source raises the question of whether or not morality is something that is being altered through the process of becoming transhuman, as observed in cyberpunk movies such as *Blade Runner 2049* and *Alita: Battle Angel*. This source relates to my own understanding and beliefs of the relation and conflicts between the values of religion and the posthuman values depicted in cyberpunk science fiction. It also clashes with many views on transhumanism that employ more scientifically defined boundaries of humanity. However, I will disagree that Alita goes "beyond the concept of humanism and defy all the rules of religion and humanity" (11), with the argument that transhuman and other posthuman enhancements do not necessarily conflict with the essence of humanity from the perspective of the Christian view, which is related to the religious views that the authors mention.

In "Chapter 1: We're All Just Looking for Something Real" from "*Blade Runner 2049*: A Philosophical Exploration," Shanahan (2019) offers four answers to the question of what it means to be human. In the first answer Shanahan describes the distinction between being born and being made, suggesting that being born makes one special and more human because of the element of intimacy involved, and an existing relationship. In the second answer Shanahan suggests that having a soul makes one human (21). In the third answer Shanahan suggests that selfless acts are what makes one human, instead of an inherent trait that determines the humanity in an individual. In the fourth answer Shanahan suggests that awareness of oneself as one's own autonomous agent is what makes one human (22).

This source raises the question of what it means to be human, and answers the question with four different answers. This book provides many insights on the movie *Blade Runner 2049*, which I have watched before, but haven't gone into any in depth analysis yet. The idea that doing something that is very human could make one human contradicts many theories of humanity that involve certain intrinsic qualities for defining the human.

In "Semblances of intimacy: Separating the Humane from the Human in *Blade Runner 2049*," Andries Hiskes (2021) explores the humane as a transitive trait that is not necessarily attached to the human (21), employing the concepts of performativity (24), and the relationship between the Schein (semblance, illusion, or "mere appearance") and the Erscheinung (appearance) (25). Hiskes examines the differentiation between the act and the act-like, observing that traditional concepts of authentic performative acts are being challenged by the potentiality of artificial intimacy displayed through continuation of the kiss scene between K and Joi (27). Hiskes explores the possible ways of defining humanity by examining the authenticity of human experiences and humanity of K, with the liberal humanist theory of having ownership of one's body (including one's memories), as a defining trait of humanity (29). Hiskes also examines the idea of the capacity to exhibit human behavior as a defining trait of humanity (36). Hiskes concludes that the boundary of defining what is human between the human and the posthuman is subverted in *Blade Runner 2049* due to the transitivity of the humane that is defined as having the ability to demonstrate material historicity, and the exhibition of humanistic behavior (37).

Hiskes proposes that the distinction between the human and the posthuman is undermined by the transitivity of the humane, but this raises questions of how transitive the humane is. Although Hiskes does explain that an individual with certain capacities could demonstrate the humane and therefore be categorized as human, how could one determine the differentiation between an individual that merely externally demonstrates these capacities, and an individual that subjectively possesses these capacities? What traits would categorize one as having authentic feelings, and able to experience intimacy? This source relates to my understanding of

the importance of the element of feelings as an essential component of the human, and sets itself

apart from many theories of defining humanity by separating the humane from the human.

In "The Posthuman Ethos in Cyberpunk Science Fiction," Goicoechea (2008) observes how the concept of the human body in cyberpunk science fiction is different from that of earlier times, denoting that according to posthuman values, the human body is not restricted to its natural from, but is something that is increasingly modified and incorporated with technology (2), and fueled by the fervor of technoromanticism (3). Goicoechea also discusses how one can observe in modern society the permeability between the natural and the artificial in the incorporation of artificial and technological tools in the human body, although not necessarily becoming a part of the human body (4). Goicoechea describes transhumanism as a product of technoromanticism and related to the illness of Narcissus, as cyberpunk individuals become trapped by the desire for control, freedom, and pleasure, and are isolated from real relationships due to the bonding between the human and technology (10). This source provides a view of how posthuman elements that cyberpunk fiction describes could impact and attenuate the humane, such as the example of Molly Millions from *Neuromancer*, who Goicoechea describes as "at once a sexual fetish and a lethal warrior" (6). Molly reflects a human form that is based on certain ideals and desires of humankind, rather than the natural. I use this source to provide some information on the topic of transhumanism.

In "Personhood: An essential characteristic of the human species." White examines two competing constructs of the personhood of human beings (75). "An *existential* construct that

personhood is a state of being inherent and essential to the human species," and, "a relational construct that personhood is a conditional state of value defined by the society" (75). The former is based on the Christian faith, and the latter on empirical evidence gathered by members of society. White avers that, "And in the transcendent nature of personhood we find the inalienable substance of human rights and the genesis of society and law" (75), in his discussion of the concept of personhood that is based on the Christian faith.

Whites argument and views on defining humanity are generally compatible with the argument in my research paper. I will use White's statements to support the conclusion of my research paper.

Methodology

In my research paper, I will examine the three components of humanity—the form, the essence, and the application, with reference to concrete examples from the three primary texts. I will discuss these three components of humanity in three stages of analyses. In the first stage, I will introduce the three components of humanity through my analyses of the three primary texts. I elaborate on these three components of humanity by describing qualities of humanity that are described, or proposed in theory, in my secondary sources. That includes the transitivity of the humane that is proposed by Hiskes, Rizwan and Shahid's Freudian analysis of Alita's character, and Parfit's theory of the indeterminateness of identity. I will elucidate on the three components of humanity, by analyzing how Christianity defines humanity according to *The Bible*, and some important principles of the Christian faith. In *Cyberpunk 2077*, the prevalence of transhumanism and the implication that one's "character" is essential to one's identity, emphasizes discussion around the visible and the invisible human "*form*." In *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita offers Hugo her heart, demonstrating *the infinite essence* of love as a component of humanity. In *Blade Runner 2049*, K decides to die for a good cause, emphasizing the "act" of humanity, and introducing the "*application*" component.

I will then move on in my discussion of the three primary texts to compare how well the philosophical theories in the secondary sources explain and define what it means to be human, and how well the Christian view of humanity provided by my interpretation of *The Bible* explains and defines what it means to be human, in terms of the three components of humanity the three primary texts allude to. Then I will conclude that the Christian view of humanity provides a more holistic definition of the human, while the humanistic and other philosophical views can only offer fragmented explanations to this question. I will demonstrate that the

Christian view of humanity succeeds in holistically defining humanity due the central concept of

divine truth that it possesses, and succeeds in the aspects of differentiation and sustainability.

Textual Analysis

Textual Analysis of *Blade Runner 2049*

Blade Runner 2049 is set in a futuristic world where "replicants", biologically engineered people, are designed and exploited for slave labor. Tyrell Corporation was the first corporation to produce replicants, but after a series of rebellions by the replicants, and the collapse of Tyrell Corporation, Wallace corporation managed to produce new replicants that obey. The older replicants, nexus eights, made by Tyrell corporation were hunted down and killed by Blade runners. K is a Blade Runner, and he hunts down a Nexus Eight replicant called Sapper Morton. After killing Sapper, he finds a box in the ground that is later revealed to be the corpse of a female replicant that is found to have become pregnant. K's superior Joshi orders K to destroy the evidence, including the child that was born, because she fears an uprising of the replicants if the news that replicants can reproduce is leaked, since for many, it would imply that the replicants are also human. K goes to investigate more on the case. He finds a wooden horse at Sapper's house that is identical to the wooden horse in his memory. After further investigation, he finds that he is the child that was born from the female replicant. Meanwhile Wallace, the head of Wallace Corporation, is also interested in the child of the female replicant because he wants to unlock the secret of producing replicants that can reproduce, so he sends his replicant servant Luv, to secure evidence and information on the whereabouts of the child, and the father of the child.

After K finds out that he may be born and not made, he finds hope of being a human being, and no longer wants to continue to be a Blade Runner, so he tells Joshi that he had killed the child, and he goes to find Deckard, the father of the child. Soon after K meets and converses

with Deckard, Luv arrives and captures Deckard, bringing him to Wallace, who questions him

about the whereabouts of the child but finds no answers. Meanwhile, K is rescued by the

replicant freedom group, who are replicants that fight for their freedom, and learns from them

that he is not actually the child. Freysa, the leader of the replicant freedom group, tells K to kill

Deckard so that Wallace will not gain information about the replicant freedom group. K

intercepts the convoy escorting Luv and Deckard to OffWorld, where Deckard would have been

tortured for information, and rescues Deckard. During K's fight with Luv, K willingly lets Luv

stab him when he sees that Deckard, who was still trapped in the car, was about to drown. After

killing Luv, K brings Deckard to see his daughter, telling him that "all the best memories are

hers" (*Blade Runner 2049* 2:29:00-02). After Deckard goes in the building, K dies while lying on

the steps leading up to the building.

    Blade Runner 2049 emphasizes the "application" component of humanity. In other

words, how humanity is applied in action, in perception, in the relationships with people, and in

choices, that ultimately demonstrate the individual's humanity, in the case of K. One of the

events in this film that highlights the "transitivity" of the humane, as proposed by Hiskes, is the

interaction between K and Joi (25). Joi is an artificial intelligence who plays the role of K's

virtual girlfriend. Although K's humanity has not yet been fully established at this stage of the

film, relative to Joi, he is the individual that possesses real human qualities according to Hiskes'

concept of humanity, because he is able to demonstrate material historicity in his actions.

However, despite the lack of material historicity of the artificial meal Joi prepares for K, Hiskes

argues that the scene gains an act-like status, due to it being an embodied domesticity (25).

    Later in this scene, Joi lights K's cigarette with her hand. According to Hiskes, in

comparison with the strictly act-like status of the previous act of preparing a virtual meal, this act

gains a certain level of authenticity due to the material reality involved (26). After Joi lights K's cigarette, K gives Joi an emulator, a device that allows K to bring Joi with him, and enables Joi to move freely. They go onto the roof of the apartment and they kiss. Hiskes reads the continuation of this kiss as "resistance to an understanding of intimacy that is constituted by its materiality, and as an affirmation of an understanding of intimacy's artificial potentiality" (27). However, although Joi demonstrates some level of human authenticity, Hiskes' proposed transitivity of the humane is not primarily targeted towards Joi, but rather, K. In Hiskes' analysis of the movie, he quotes Halyes "that the liberal humanist subject relates to its body through ownership over that body, rather than coinciding with that body (4), which thus suggests a modicum of distance and control over the body the subject inhabits" (29). Hiskes thus avers that:

> If K's memory is real rather than artificial, K embodies his memory rather than its being an implant and therefore artificial, arbitrary, and removable. The reality of the memory would imply that he is actually human, and therefore would seem to be able to become free from the will of others, unlike the replicants, who are designed to be bound to the will of the human (29).

Hiskes later concludes that "the desire to be in control of one's own will is subjugated to the realization that instead, even when one is unable to determine by what will the replicant is driven, what remains continuous is the embodied capacity to exhibit humane behavior" (36). Therefore, to see K's interaction with Joi with a new lens, K establishes his embodied capacity to exhibit human behavior through interactions with a human-like being, who, through the seemingly act-like, helps to bring out his humanity. I read Hiskes' conclusion as meaning that

"real" human experiences and human actions, are found in one's ability to exhibit humanity, rather than the humanity of who or what the individual is interacting with. This leads back to the idea that the humane is transitive to the extent that one who can exhibit humanity could possibly be human.

In terms of the choices that K makes, a crucial choice that defines K's humanity is the choice to die for a good cause, as suggested by Freysa, the leader of the replicant freedom group in the film, when she says, "Dying for the right cause, it's the most human this we can do" (*Blade Runner 2049* 2:06:21-25). Shanahan analyzes the meaning of Freysa's statement, averring that, "Presupposed are the assumptions that (a) K is not present (fully) human, (b) dying for a cause greater than oneself is a 'human' thing to do, and (c) it is through one's choices and actions, rather than because of what one essentially is, that one can approximate the state of being authentically human that humans, who were born, automatically enjoy" (22). However, this statement by Shanahan goes beyond what can be inferred in the film, because what Freysa says to K does not eliminate the possibility that the members of the replicant freedom group, and K, see themselves as possibly essentially human, and are seeking to authenticate the humanity that they think they might have. Nonetheless, Shanahan's analysis of Freysa's words to K describes the concept of how "one's choices and actions" exhibits one's humanity (22), which is compatible with the "application" component of humanity. In the film, Freysa tells K to kill Deckard "for the greater good" so that Deckard would not give away any information about the replicant freedom group. But K apparently acknowledged the value of human life, and decided to save Deckard when he willingly lets himself get stabbed by Luv, when he saw that Deckard was drowning, since he knew that if he and Luv kept on fighting where they were, Deckard would most likely drown. K loved Deckard since he saw him as his father, if only for a short time. This

is evident at the end of the film, when K says to Deckard "All the best memories are hers" (*Blade Runner 2049* 2:29:00-02), to which Deckard replies "Why, who am I to you" (*Blade Runner 2049* 2:29:12-16)? This implies an existence of love, that motivates K to sacrifice himself for Deckard. Therefore, in response to Shanahan's view that selfless acts make one human (22), the love that motivated such an action in the film is equally important for the existence of humanity.

From a Christian perspective of the application of humanity, love is essential. According to *The Bible*, humans were created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). This particular verse can be read in light of the verse "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Therefore, according to the Christian faith one can infer that humans are made in the image of "love," which means that love is essential to humanity, and hence it is also essential to the application of humanity. The main theme of K establishing his humanity with a selfless act of love in *Blade Runner 2049* agrees with love as the essence of humanity. However, Hiskes' theory of the transitivity of the humane proposes that an individual that is able to demonstrate the "act" rather than the "act-like" by showing material historicity, and the ability to exhibit human behavior, could be considered human. Does that mean if a robot that can physically interact with the environment and the people around it, and is also programmed to simulate human behavior, could be considered to be human? In addition, would it be considered to have *life*, if it is considered to be human? Furthermore, does an individual have to be alive to be human? Hiskes' theory of transitivity answers none of these questions, which leaves his theory in an incomplete state since it is unable to explain the nature of the humane, or humanity, in a holistic manner.

In contrast, from the Christian perspective, life is given to humanity by God (Gen. 2:7). Moreover, Jesus Christ, who is God according to the Christian faith, states that "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). If God is "the life," then it must be that some form or

degree of "the life" that is being referred to is also essential to humanity, since humans are created in God's "image." Thus, the Christian faith not only states that humans ought to be alive, but can also achieve "the life" through God. Although there is much to be said about what "the life" is, it is without a doubt that life is essential to humanity. According to the Christian view of humanity, a robot would never qualify as a human, because it was not given life from God, nor does it possess the essential component of love, which is a strictly divine essence, because "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

Blade Runner 2077 agrees with the Christian view of humanity regarding the essential component of life. K is devastated when Luv destroys Joi by crushing the emulator with her foot. Later, K meets another Joi in the form of a huge hologram, which was part of an advertisement for Joi. This Joi spoke to him seductively and even called him by the name that his Joi gave him, and at that moment he realized that the Joi he knew was never a real person, but merely a manufactured product. This is shown in the movie, when the hologram Joi speaks to K, he looks up at her hopefully, but after she says "You look like a good Joe" (Blade Runner 2049 2:17:24-28), he looks down in disappointment and throws away the bandage that was on the bridge of his nose. Then he looks down at his gun, and looks forward with a new resolve in his gaze, as he hears the voice of Freysa in his mind saying that "Dying for the right cause, it's the most human thing we can do" (Blade Runner 2049 2:06:21-25). In this scene, K has already found out that he is not born like he thought he was, and that Joi was never a real girlfriend. Because of the hope that he had of being human, he decides that he wants do the most human thing, to die for the right cause, in order to prove that his humanity is real, in the face of all the things in his life that are fake and manufactured. This scene of Joi shows how the movie ultimately depicts Joi as being fake, despite having human attributes and displaying humanistic behavior. This resonates

with the Christian view that a robot, or any artificial intelligence, cannot be human, since it does not have life or love.

Textual Analysis of *Alita: Battle Angel*

In *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita is a cyborg, whose body is mostly made of mechanical and artificial parts. Ido, a man who specializes in fixing and building cyborg bodies, finds Alita in the scrap yard of Iron City. He gives Alita a new body, one that he built himself. When Alita wakes up, she does not remember anything about herself, but she is fascinated by the world around her, and shows a child-like enthusiasm towards simple things, like chocolate and fruit. Alita meets Hugo in Iron City, who shows her around. Alita quickly falls in love with him. One night, Alita sees Ido leaving the house, so she follows him out of curiosity, finding that he is out hunting criminal cyborgs. Ido falls in a trap laid by two criminal cyborgs, and they are about to kill him. Instead of running, as Ido instructs her to do, Alita fights the two cyborgs and kills them. A third criminal cyborg Grewishka, who serves politically powerful people, challenges Alita. Alita breaks his arm and he escapes.

Alita starts to remember things about herself due to flashbacks, and realizes that she was a warrior. When exploring the rural area of Iron City with her friends, Alita comes across an abandoned spaceship, and she somehow has access to it and finds a powerful body that belongs to her. Ido refuses to unite Alita with her body, because he knows that she was a former URM berserker, a member of a group of elite cyborg warriors. He explains his reason by saying to her that, "You are not just a warrior, Alita. You are an URM Berserker, the most advanced cyborg weapon ever created. And that is exactly why I will never unite you with this body" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 54:45-55:00). Alita is angry about this, and she decides to join the hunter-warriors. She

tries to rally the hunter-warriors to fight injustice, which ends in a second confrontation with Grewishka, who after significant upgrades manages to destroy her body, but she survives. Since her body is destroyed, Ido unites her with her original body, which makes her virtually unstoppable. Alita offers Hugo her mechanical heart, because she wants him to sell it so that he can fulfill his dream of going to Zolom, the city in the sky that resides over Iron City. Hugo refuses to accept it.

Alita participates in a Motorball contest, but the participants are hunter warriors that are ordered to kill her, as the higher-ups see her as a threat. Alita defeats them, but Zapan, who is jealous of her, uses this opportunity to try to kill Hugo in an attempt to hurt her. Hugo is wounded, and Alita later finds out that he is actually a criminal who tears other cyborgs apart in order to sell their parts, but Alita forgives him. Ido gives Hugo a cyborg body in order to save him from his injuries. Hugo tries to walk up to Zolom in a desperate attempt to escape the bounty on his head. Alita finds him halfway up and tries to convince him to come down with her, telling him that "We don't belong anywhere except together" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:52:35-38). The villain in Zolom, Nova, activates a deadly killing mechanism, which kills Hugo, although Alita survives.

The central theme of *Blade Runner 2049* emphasizes the application component of humanity, or the "act" of humanity, that is only possible due to the essence of humanity that was previously mentioned. In *Alita: Battle Angel*, the essence of humanity is the central theme. To begin with, one important scene in *Alita: Battle Angel* that makes the connection between Alita's characteristics that are exposed through her actions, and her humanity, is the kiss scene between Alita and Hugo, that takes place after Alita regains her original body. In this scene, Alita asks Hugo, "Does it bother you that I'm not completely human" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:16:13-17)?

Hugo replies, "You are the most human person I have ever met" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:16:19-22). Perhaps the most obvious instance that shows Alita's humanity, an instance that fully agrees with the view of humanity from a Christian perspective, is when Alita offers Hugo her heart at Hugo's apartment. In this scene, Alita tells Hugo that "I'd give you whatever I have" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:20:43-44), and that, "I'd give you my heart" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:20:49-50), as she pulls out her mechanical heart, that is said by Ido to be "strong enough to power all of Iron City for years" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 36:09-12). She wants to give her heart to Hugo so that he could fulfill his dream of going to Zolom, the city in the sky, which required no small amount of money, according to Hugo. She wants Hugo to sell it and then find a cheap replacement for her.

At this point in the movie, Alita has not gotten to know Hugo well, but she already loves him fully and unconditionally, which is why she is willing to give him her heart. This resonates with the Christian idea of love, as in *the Bible*, during the conversation of *the rich young man* asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17), "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21), showing unconditional love, without having known much about or even spent much time with that person, and also without any kind of materialistic benefit.

Alita further reiterates the nature of her love for Hugo by explaining that "It's all or nothing with me" (*Alita: battle Angel* 1:21:19-20). Hugo refuses to take her heart saying that, "Don't just do things for people, no matter how good you think they are, or how deserving they are" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:21:11-18). This scene also shows how different and innocent Alita is, in contrast with the phenomenon of the state of the world around her that emphasizes selfish and materialistic values, where "The strong prey on the weak" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 23:03-04). As a side note, this phenomenon is present in modern societies as well. A particular instance of such an observation that Lay refers to in his discussion of transhumanism is one that Persson and

Savulescu make, stating that "Extravagant consumption and self-interest tend to dominate, even in liberal democratic societies" (4). The scene of Alita giving her heart to Hugo, also shows how Alita, who is able to love unconditionally, and demonstrates extraordinary courage in being willing to stand against evil in other scenes in the film, possess a level of "heavenliness." A concept that is reinforced by the title of the film, that dubs Alita as an "Angel." This also suggests a connection with Christian values, that are evident throughout the film.

In this scene, one can also observe the "infinite" quality of love. Infinite in the sense of immeasurability, that love cannot be measured or calculated in an economic or materialistic manner. By loving Hugo, Alita is not gaining any materialistic benefit. It is also infinite in the sense that love is better than anything, which is shown later in the film when Alita tells Hugo, "We don't belong anywhere except together" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 1:52:35-38). Implying that none of the glory, greatness, and prosperity that Zolom could possibly offer, could be better than love. The importance of love that is highlighted in Alita's character, and Hugo's statement that Alita is "the most human person" he has ever met, show how the film suggests that love is the essence of humanity.

Another way to analyze *Alita: Battle Angel* is by examining the transhuman aspects of the film. Goicoechea describes someone that has undergone transhuman enhancement, or the cyborg, as "that character that every one makes to measure, in this vision of the future that is already the present, in which the body no longer is a physical barrier to be respected, but one out of the many that are daily crossed and manipulated, by oneself or others" (7). Alita, as well as the cyborgs that appear in the film have transhuman bodies. When Ido tells Alita about who she is, he points out that although she has a mechanical body, her brain is that of a normal human being. Rizwan and Shahid offer a critical view of transhumanism, in relation to the examination of the

state of humanity, in *Alita: Battle Angel*, by using Freud's theoretical framework on

transhumanism that "revolves around the idea of a man turning into a prosthetic God" (5). They

argue that transhumanism, as seen in *Alita: Battle Angel*, is used as a means to satisfy one's

"Pleasure Principle" or "Ego" (5). In other words, according to Rizwan and Shahid,

transhumanism is the process of making "happiness" one's ultimate goal, and going against "the

natural balance or order" to accomplish it (6). Therefore, in this view, Alita's innate powers,

thanks to her powerful mechanical heart and former combat training, and gaining her Berserker

body, are a means for her to gain more control over her own present and future (8), and control

other people in a God like fashion, according to Freud (5), which is presumably how Rizwan and

Shahid would interpret Alita literally destroying everyone that opposes her after she is united

with her Berserker body. According to this perspective, Alita is going beyond the concept of

humanism and defies all rules of religion and humanity (11). As part of the discussion of the

state of humanity in *Alita: Battle Angel*, Rizwan and Shahid argue that, "going beyond human

makes us less human and more machine and we lose our sense of humanity" (11). According to

the argument set forth by Rizwan and Shahid, humanity is grounded in the natural physical form

of the human body, as well as the mental acknowledgement of "the natural balance or order" (6).

Anything that goes beyond the natural, attenuates humanity.

　　　Contrary to the view of humanity with love as the essence, Rizwan and Shahid do not

describe humanity as having an essence, but rather, something that only exists given that certain

conditions are met (11). The problematic part of Rizwan and Shahid's argument is that, without

an essence, or a central concept of truth for humanity to be based on, and only relying on certain

requirements to paint the picture of humanity, humanity is left undefined. Applying certain rules

that dictate what humanity ought to be, instead of the divine truth of love, ensues that anyone can

make new rules that somehow "define" what humanity is, and proclaim anything that deviates from those rules as deviating from humanity. Which is evident as Rizwan and Shahid claim that Alita defies all rules of religion and humanity, even though she clearly shows the most important characteristics of love, that is central in Christianity. Indicating that basing the definition of humanity on a certain set of rules, only creates division and inconsistency in defining humanity, and hence is an unsustainable way of defining the human.

On the other hand, love as the essence of humanity is based on the divine truth of God himself, because "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and because humans are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). Different from Rizwan and Shahid's view — "going beyond human makes us less human and more machine and we lose our sense of humanity" (11), that contends that transhumanism is incompatible with humanity, Christianity is not inherently against the concept of transcending the original physical body of the human. In *the Bible*, it is stated that, "who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). This means that in Christianity, transcending the original human body is part of God's intended plan for humans. A reasonable deduction is that although the Christian view is not against the concept of transcending the original physical body of the human, it may be an overstatement to state that transhuman enhancements are within what would be considered good in Christianity, since transhumanism entails transcending the human body through technological means, which is a means that is not mentioned in *The Bible*. But it would also be an overstatement to state that all technological enhancements to the human body are wrong in the Christian view, for the same reason. But Christianity does offer a solution to this dilemma with the method of discernment, in the verse that states, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are

from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1), which when applied in this context, can mean that the prospect of transhuman enhancements should be discerned according to God's will. In other words, whether or not a particular act of enhancement is in line with the values of love.

In the setting of *Alita: Battle Angel*, Alita is already a cyborg, so it is not as if she decided to become transhuman out of a particular purpose, but she notably desires to be united with her Berserker body. Her motivations for such a desire are ambiguous. For one, she feels that it is an important part of her identity. When she brings the Berserker body to Ido, she says to Ido, "I feel a connection to it, but I can't explain. This could be who I am" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 53:27-32). In terms of the power that comes with the Berserker body, Alita does say to Ido that, "This body, it has the power I need" (*Alita: Battle Angel* 53:23-27). The film suggests that this may not be a very strong motive for Alita, since she is willing to forego her most powerful body part ─ her heart, for the sake of love. Besides, it is worth noting that Alita says that the body has the power she "needs," not the power she "wants." This implies that her desire for such power is due to necessity. In application, having her Berserker body helps her defend herself and Hugo against assassination attempts, which is an act of self-defense, rather than an act of cruelty. In conclusion, love as the essence of humanity is a more consistent and reliable way to explain humanity, in comparison with the set of rules proposed by Rizwan and Shahid, or any set of rules that dictate what humanity is. From the perspective of Christianity, this is because it is a divine concept that is "infinite" and undisputable due to its direct relation to God.

Textual Analysis of *Cyberpunk 2077*

Cyberpunk 2077 is a video game that has multiple beginnings of the story, as well as multiple endings, that the player can choose. In addition, the choices that the player makes throughout the story also influence the outcome of the plot. For the purpose of this research paper, I will only be analyzing certain versions of the story of V, the main character that the player plays as, that are especially relevant to the topic and argument of this research paper. These versions of the story are also the ones I will mention in the summary.

In my first play-through of *Cyberpunk 2077*, I started as a "Corpo," female V. The Corpo lifepath begins with V as an agent working for Arasaka Corporation, the largest and most powerful corporation in Night City. She experiences first-hand the corruption, greed, and utter disregard for the lives of others, in a scramble for wealth and power among the elites of Night City. A vivid exposition of such phenomena is shown as V is summoned to Jenkins, her superior's office, and witnesses how he orders the killing of members of the European Space Council for his own convenience. Later when Jenkin's superior, director Abernathy, calls to threaten him, he orders V to "make sure Abernathy won't be a problem anymore" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). V then meets with her trusted friend Jackie Wells to discuss the situation. Jackie is displeased with V's request for him to help in such a matter, and criticizes her of "selling her soul" to the corporation. Then Abernathy's people come to the bar and revoke her access to all corporate associated cybernetics, and take her financial savings as well. However, Jackie saves V's life by threatening to start a gunfight with Abernathy's people if they try to take V away with them. After this incident, V has to start her life anew.

After some success as a mercenary-for-hire, or a merc, on the streets of Night City, Jackie finds a job for V and him that could elevate their status as mercs to the "major leagues." They team up with the famous fixer, Dexter Deshawn, to go on a heist to secure a valuable biochip

made by the Arasaka corporation. They planned to steal from none other than Yorinobu Arasaka, heir to the Arasaka empire. Unfortunately, just after they got the biochip, Yorinabu's father, Saburo enters the scene unexpected, and confronts Yorinobu for attempting to sell their most valuable achievement to another company, which is the biochip that V and Jackie had stolen. During the confrontation, Yorinobu loses his temper and strangles Saburo to death, resulting in the "Code Red" security status being initiated in the hotel, which then resulted in the discovery of V and Jackie by security personnel. They fight their way out of the building, and Jackie ends up dying in the car from his injuries, after they got out. V then goes to the agreed rendezvous location and meets up with Dexter to discuss the next move. However, Dexter betrays V and shoots her in the head. V survives due to the biochip that they stole, slotted in her head, that preserves her brain, but is found to be gradually taking over her consciousness.

The biochip is an engram of Johnny Silverhand, which means that Johnny Silverhand is "living" in V's brain, and is involuntarily taking over her mind, due to the nature of the biochip. Therefore, V does not have long to live, and tries to find ways to save herself, with the help of Johnny, who eventually develops a friendship with V. Johnny was a rock musician, who sought to bring down the corruption, and oppression caused by the corporations, with violence. After the events of the story, he changes as a person, and he lets go of his zeal for revenge against Arasaka.

Many more events happen throughout the story, but ultimately there are two endings that are particularly important for the discussion of this paper.

The first one is the Corpo ending. In this ending, V seeks the help of Hanako Arasaka, Yorinobu's sister, to assist with the problem of the biochip, which results in V either joining the "secure your soul" program that downloads her engram into Arasaka databases in hopes of

finding her a new body; or leaving Arasaka after the biochip is removed from her brain, only to die a few months later due to the damage cause by the removal of the biochip. In this ending, V helps in the capture of Yorinobu, who is later revealed to be rebellious against Saburo because of his realization of the evil that Arasaka had created, which results in Yorinobu getting killed and his body taken over by Saburo's engram. Johnny resents V for aligning with Arasaka, the corporation that represents the very values that he, V, Jackie, and many other friends had been fighting against.

The second one is the Nomad ending. In this ending, V enlists the help of her friend Panam and her fellow nomads to help her get into Mikoshi, which is located in the Arasaka building, in order to solve the problem of the biochip. At Mikoshi, Johnny agrees to go into cyberspace with Alt, his lover, so that V can continue to live in her own body. Before V leaves, Johnny says to V, "Goodbye V, and never stop fighting" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Then V wakes up on Panam's car, and with the rest of the nomads, they make a run for the border, leaving Night City behind.

Cyberpunk 2077 primarily explores the "form" component of humanity. To be more specific, the visible form and the invisible form, which are respectively the physical resemblance and attributes of a human, and the character of a person that constitutes one's humanity. *Cyberpunk 2077* also agrees with love as the essence of humanity, which is shown as being in relation to the form of the human.

Regarding the form of humanity in *Cyberpunk 2077*, Lay examines both the visible and invisible form of humanity in his analysis of *Cyberpunk 2077*. He begins with a vivid imagery of the forms in *Cyberpunk 2077*:

Cyberpunk 2077 is a videogame about bodies. Night City – the main setting of the game
– is choked with holographic advertisements that stretch into the evening sky, towering
above the tallest skyscraper; even the most benign of these ads are hypercharged with an
exploitative sexuality, whether the bodies in question are female, male, or transgender.
Cyberpunk is also a video game about minds. The driving force behind the game's
critical path – the quests that compose the main story threads – is the idea that a digitized
construct copied from the brain of anarchist musician Johnny Silverhand gradually
overwrites the player's character and protagonist V's mind into nonexistence (2).

Transhumanism is undoubtedly one of the most prominent themes in *Cyberpunk 2077*. In the
discussion of transhumanism, Lay provides some background of the reasoning behind
transhumanism with the idea of transhumanism that was first proposed by Huxley, which is the
call for humanity to "'transcend itself' through the use of scientific enhancement that can redraw
the boundaries of what is humanly possible" (3). Thus, according to Huxley, achieving the "full
potential" of humanity (3).

Lay points out the need for transhuman enhancements in the setting of *Cyberpunk 2077*,
"Whether a street kid scraping by on petty crime or a corpo-rat skittering up the corporate ladder,
almost everyone needs the advantage a ripperdoc can provide – ordinary human bodies and
minds just are not enough to succeed in Night City" (2). The question that arises is that it is
unclear at what point humanity loses itself in the process of transhumanism, in the clash between
the originality of what is considered to be human, and the result of transhuman enhancements.
As such, it is in the face of the "transcendence" of humanity through technological means, that

forces us to rediscover what humanity is, which is how the question of "what it means to be human" is implied in *Cyberpunk 2077*.

Lay responds to this question with a discussion that incorporates many philosophical theories. Firstly, Lay employs a pragmatic approach to the question of "what it means to be human" by examining the potential benefits of transhumanism. Lay quotes Persson and Savulescu's theory that contends that "the best way to ensure proper concern for future generations of humans and the entire nonhuman ecosystem is through transhuman enhancement that produces more sustainable moral motivations" (4). The reason being that "Extravagant consumption and self-interest tend to dominate, even in liberal democratic societies" (4). In *Night City*, greed and self-interest are dominant values, which may not be much different from the society today, which the massive financial disparities that are prevalent in many modern societies reflect. Yet one could argue that this is because many humans have rejected the values of love and charity that are proposed in Christianity, and that love is the answer to an increasingly materialistic and individualistic society, instead of transhumanism.

In addition, Lay also quotes Haraway's theory that transhumanism creates equality within society, in opposition to essentialist categorizations in Western societies that "draw rigid boundaries" within groups, and "brings about many harmful sexist, racist, and otherwise problematic assumptions" (5). This "equality" created by transhumanism is observable in Night City. For example, Hanako Arasaka is seventy-eight years old during the events of *Cyberpunk 2077*, yet she looks like a young lady due to her expensive transhuman enhancements, showing that this "equality" is only available to the elites of society. In addition, the notion that equality can be created through transhuman enhancements suggests a conditional way of being valued that hinges on the attributes that transhumanism can provide. On the other hand, Christian love

creates equality because it offers unconditional value in every person. Since love is infinite and unconditional, if everyone is loved, then every person would be valued infinitely regardless of what qualities each person possesses. Furthermore, since "God is love" (1 John 4:16), unity with God is the key to achieving equality in society, according to Christianity. Moreover, none of the inequalities and discriminations that Haraway mentions would have happened if people had followed Christ's commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Therefore, in conclusion to my analysis of these pragmatic approaches that are proposed in Persson and Savulescu, and Haraway's theories, in the examination of the potential benefits of transhumanism that Lay discusses, it seems that all the problems that transhumanism is proposed to solve in these theories have been caused because many people had chosen to reject love, thus rejecting God.

Lay then moves on to discuss the retainment of human identity in the process of transhuman enhancements. Lay uses the Ship of Theseus puzzle that was credited to the Greek historian Plutarch to illustrate the problem of the loss of identity in transhumanism (7). The Ship of Theseus puzzle explores whether or not a ship is the same ship after repairing and swapping the parts of the ship for other parts, similar to the cybernetic enhancement process one sees in *Cyberpunk 2077*. Lay initially uses Parfit's theory of continuity to answer this puzzle, which posits that if the ship is changed gradually and not all of a sudden, it retains its identity. After discussing some flaws in the theory of continuity, Lay concludes with another theory by Parfit that postulates that "it is possible that identity is sometimes indeterminate," and that "identity is not what matters" (10). Lay also provides an example from *Cyberpunk 2077* to illustrate this: "This is clear to the doll at Clouds who talks V down from a crisis of personal identity,

remarking 'Not a single thing in this world isn't in the process of becoming something else'"

(11).

However, evidence from the game suggest that *Cyberpunk 2077* as a whole is vehemently against the idea that personal identity is indeterminate, at least in terms of one's character, which is what Johnny Silverhand explains to V in the Corpo ending when he says "Swap meat for chrome, live a BD fantasy, whatever – but at the end of it all, it's the code you live by that defines who you are" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Another example that shows *Cyberpunk 2077*'s opposition of identity as being indeterminate is the Nomad ending, in which V leaves Night City with Panam, and finds meaning in the fellowship with the nomads. In this ending, V stays true to her values, she does not align herself with Arasaka, and she also transcends her own character by not seeking glory and wealth for herself, but rather, leaving behind the desire for materialistic gains that Night City offers, for freedom. The Nomad ending not only agrees with Johnny's idea about staying true one's character, but also suggests that change towards a higher moralistic purpose can enhance one's humanity. The Nomad ending ends with the scene of V letting go of a token symbolizing her past, and saying to Panam "It's perfect – all great Panam, we're going home" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). The fact that all the power and materialistic gains that Night City has to offer could not have led V to a happier ending, but leaving Night City with the nomads as family, and with a true friend in Panam is "perfect," goes to show how *Cyberpunk 2077* ultimately agrees that love is the essence of humanity.

Regarding the argument of human identity in the "form" of the human, *Cyberpunk 2077* as well as Christian essentialism suggests that it is important to understand the source of human identity, that is depicted as the essence of love that is manifest not only in one's innate character, but also in the physical form. According to Christianity, the physical body of the human is in

direct relation to God, the essence, in the sense that human bodies are "temples of the Holy

Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19). Indicating a connection between the innate character and the physical

resemblance that are all formed in accordance to the essence. Johnny Silverhand's words, "Swap

meat for chrome, live a BD fantasy, whatever – but at the end of it all, it's the code you live by

that defines who you are" (*Cyberpunk 2077*), seems to emphasize the innate character over the

physical body, but that is not to say that the character has no connection to physical resemblance.

In fact, *Cyberpunk 2077* suggests that there should be a coherence between the visible and

invisible form of the human, as people who undergo excessive transhuman enhancements tend to

experience "Cyberpsychosis" as they lose their sense of self (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Lay summarizes

Cyberpunk 2077's view on transhumanism, and the relation between the forms and humanity, in

the socio-economic context:

> *Cyberpunk 2077*'s final word on transhumanism thus becomes this: people must reject a
>
> suffocating consumerism that seeks to repackage individuality as profit and instead
>
> refocus on relationships of dependence. Transhuman enhancement is a brute fact of Night
>
> City, and there are many benefits to having access to enhancement. All the same, it
>
> sharply reflects a wider problem of the society in which it is embedded – the ease with
>
> which bodies and minds can be exploited by institutions within that society. To
>
> Cyberpunk, this exploitation succeeds in dehumanizing the individual, even if
>
> enhancement itself does not (21).

Here, Lay describes the attenuation of humanity at the hands of institutions that promote

materialism, in opposition to relationships and dependence. This suggests a requisite state of the

body and mind to qualify as aspects of the constitution of humanity, since the exploitation of either aspect can result in dehumanizing the individual. This does agree with love as the essence of humanity, because the state of having relationships and dependence is part of the broad concept of love.

Therefore, both *Cyberpunk 2077* and the Christian view of humanity agree that the visible and invisible form of the human are interconnected, and that the essence of love is the source of human identity, regarding the "form" of the human. While Lay's summary of *Cyberpunk 2077*'s view on transhumanism also agrees with love as the essence of the forms of humanity, in the sense that the body and mind ought to be in a certain state that is within Christian love. In contrast, the theory that human identity could be indeterminate is unsustainable for humanity, and fails in the aspect of differentiation much like the theory of the transitivity of the humane proposed by Hiskes. Since a definition of humanity without human identity contradicts with the notion of the existence of humanity itself, because without human identity there would be no way of determining what is and what is not human.
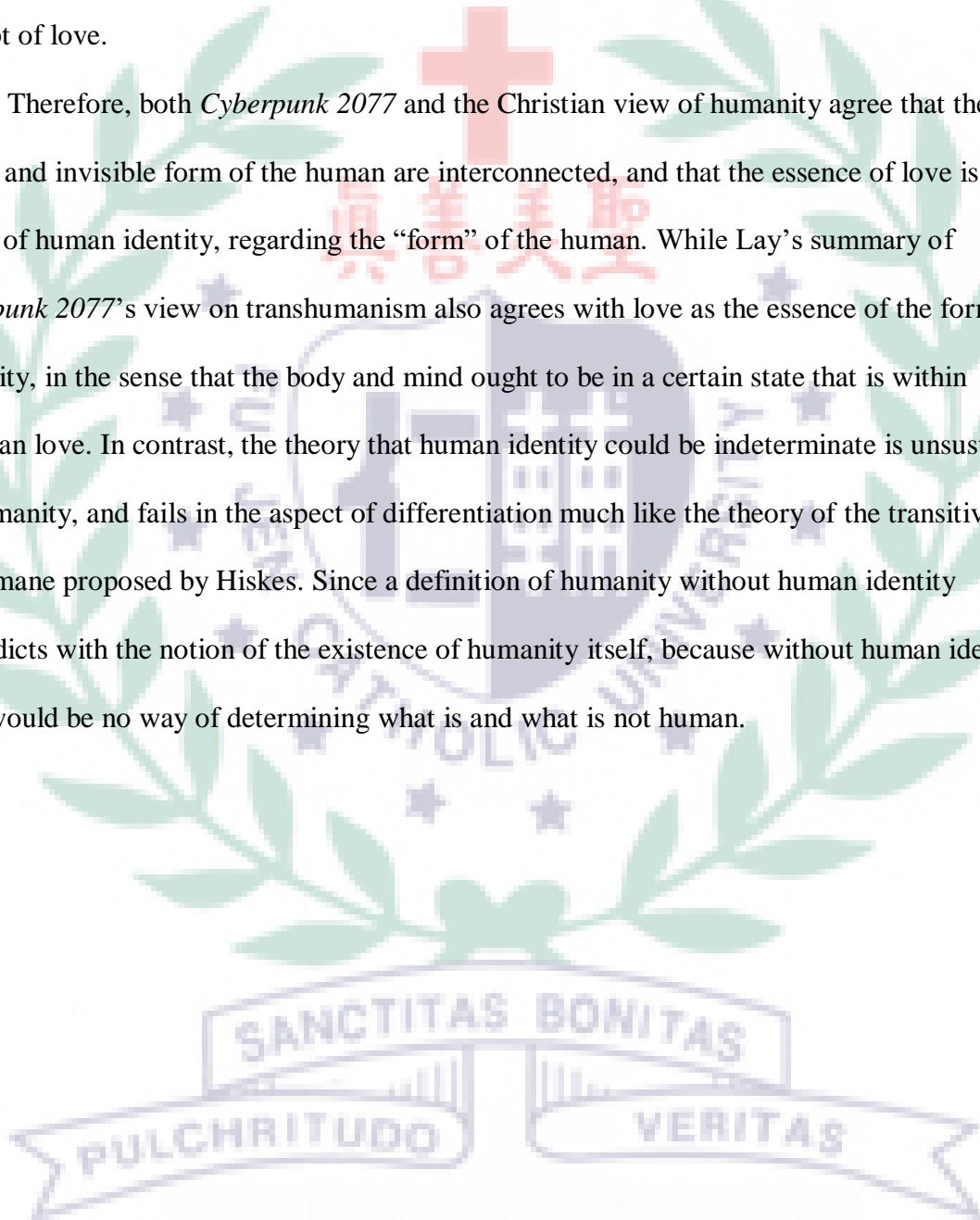
Conclusion

A Christian perspective can holistically explain what it means to be human in terms of the application, the essence, and the form of humanity that *Blade Runner 2049*, *Alita: Battle Angel*, and *Cyberpunk 2077* explore. In the Christian view of humanity, all three components are united under one definition ─ the image of God (Gen. 1:27), in light of the understanding that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). A feat that only the Christian view achieves, which shows holisticness and coherence in defining humanity. Although only three other philosophical theories are employed in the comparative analysis with the Christian view of humanity in this paper, one for each component, each philosophical theory can potentially represent a category of philosophical theory that attempt to explain humanity. The theory that the humane is transitive, and the theory that seeks to define humanity with a set of rules, respectively fail in the aspects of differentiation from machines, and sustainability as a foundation for humanity to exist. While the idea that human identity could be indeterminate fails in both differentiation and sustainability. On the other hand, The Christian view flawlessly succeeds in both aspects, which entails the retainment of human rights, human dignity, and reverence for human life. This is a conclusion that White agrees with in "*Personhood: An essential characteristic of the human species*." As he states that "For the Christian, the notion that something reflective of the divine exists in all of humanity is foundational to human personhood." He further states that, "And in the transcendent nature of personhood we find the inalienable substance of human rights and the genesis of society and law" (75).

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