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**What Jesus Did, Does, and May Do in Future:
Gospel Miracles as an Inspirational Source
(and an Ethical Problem) for Human Augmentation**

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Abstract: In their appropriation of Jesus, Christian Transhumanists ignore the healings of his earthly ministry because they restore rather than enhance human bodies. Building on readings which see the mental abilities of the deaf man in Mark 7.32-37 as being enhanced by Jesus, this article examines the healings of three blind men (Mark 8.22-26, Mark 10.46-52 and John 9.1-41). While the Johannine blind man is explicitly blind from birth, we argue that Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10 should also be viewed this way. Their lack of sighted-experience means that their ability to see instantly implies the presence of an augmentative element to their healings. A brief postscript notes the different attitudes to permission within these two narratives and suggests Transhumanists consider carefully how the earthly Jesus might be incorporated into their discussions.

Keywords: Christian Transhumanism; Reception Exegesis; Gospels; Miracles of Jesus; Non-restorative healings; Deafness/Blindness.

1. Introduction: Jesus's healings and Christian Transhumanism

Questions about Jesus and his potential place in discussions about human augmentation first arose for us while working on a grant application concerned with future technological interventions into the lives of deaf and intersex people and their echoing of variously forms of treatment in the last two centuries. If humanity's future is to become 'cyborg variants' through medical or technological actions—whether as modified individuals or as a collective population augmented in service to someone's 'normative template'—what might past experiences of bodily or psychological interventions offer to such people today? It was while concerned with the experiences of these contemporary communities that we came to realise that discussions of Transhumanism within Christian circles make minimal use, if any, of the earthly healing miracles of Jesus. When Karen Lebacqz discusses them in the context of humans acting as creative beings made in the image of God the Creator and hence as enhancers of the world, for example, she first implies that they are relevant for Christian Transhumanism, but then constructs her discussion so as to side-line them completely.

The story of Jesus's actions may be taken to suggest the overcoming of limits. Healing stories certainly play a central role in depictions of Jesus's life and ministry. But some would say these show only that we are meant to attain the "normal healthy" functioning of human life and not to go beyond it. If such stories never go beyond our natural limits, then they hardly suggest support for enhancement efforts. Is there any evidence in these stories of genuine transcendence of human life and limits or enhancements beyond the simple

restoration of health? I believe so. Setting aside the ultimate resurrection, we might look at the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11.1-44). This story at a minimum suggests transcendence of the most crucial limit on human life, which is death. Further the Gospels are full of stories where water is turned to wine or a few loaves and fishes feed thousands. Can there be any doubt that, in these stories, normal limits have been set aside? Nor are these acts limited to Jesus behaviour; the disciples are also meant to do such “miracles” (Rom. 8.14) (Lebacqz, 2011:57).

Despite Lebacqz’s apparent belief that the Gospels contain miracles demonstrating human “enhancements beyond the simple restoration of health”, the examples she actually includes are a resurrected body, Lazarus, and various nature miracles; she ignores the healing miracles altogether. Presumably she is edging towards an agreement with her unnamed interlocutors that the healings of Jesus are virtually irrelevant to discussions about Transhumanism.

While having no abiding interest in the Christian Transhumanism debate ourselves, we consider the response of Lebacqz and co to these biblical texts to be an illuminating one, offering a potential interpretative appropriation which might offer us new insights into the exegesis of healing texts, an example of what Paul Joyce and Diana Lipton have called reception exegesis (Joyce & Lipton, 2013). In what follows we wish to pursue the question of human augmentation and certain of Jesus’s healing miracles, first in regard to the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7.32-37 and then to the healing of two blind men, Bartimaeus in Mark 10.46-52 and the unnamed man in John 9.1-41. We will conclude that not only have the Transhumanists tended to mischaracterise each of these healing texts as acts of restoration rather than as one’s creating new human possibilities, so have many New Testament scholars.

2. A preliminary case of human augmentation--the deaf man of Mark 7.32-37

In an article entitled ‘How the “New Testament” Shaped Deaf People at St Saviour’s Oxford Street: A Study in Reception History and in Reception Exegesis’ and published in *Relegere* in 2016, we introduced and discussed an interpretation of the deaf man of Mark 7.32-37 that was published in 1874 by Richard Rowland Williams (1825-1879), an Englishman deafened through accidental exposure to vitriol at ten years of age (Lyons, 2016: 178-80; 185-86). In contrast to modern exegetes who tend to see the man as deafened late in life and restored through a miraculous physical healing to a previous-enjoyed life of hearing and speech, scholars such as Adela Yarbro Collins (Collins, 2007:370) and William L. Lane (Lane, 1974:266), Williams saw the man as either deaf from birth or as deafened at a sufficiently early age that he had not yet gained a working knowledge of the local spoken language.¹ Unable to conclude that Jesus had only performed a physical healing of the physical mechanisms related to the man’s hearing (his ears) and speech (his mouth), Williams suggested that Jesus had also

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¹ Cf. for a discussion of the assumptions these interpretations necessarily involve, see Lyons 2016:182-85.

given the man two additional ‘things’, a competence in the local spoken language and a knowledge of how it applied to the world around him (Williams, 1874:54-55).

William’s argument was echoed across the Atlantic, at the Eighth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf in the United States in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1907 by that organisation’s President, George Veditz (1861-1937); Veditz had also lost his hearing as a child, to scarlet fever at eight years of age (Veditz, 1907:24-28). The context of his words was a speech in which he discussed the future of America’s signing deaf people against the backdrop of Europe’s conversion to ‘Oralism’ over the previous three decades; oralist ideology held that deaf people should only be taught to speak and to lip-read and, in extremes, banned sign language and even deaf friendship. Veditz noted that Oralism’s proponents freely used “catch phrases” such as “‘the deaf hear and the dumb speak,’ ‘the age of miracles is not past,’ [and] ‘the deaf are restored to society’” (Veditz, 1907:27). But such language, he went on to argue, was justified only during Jesus’ ministry in Judea:

Then only were the deaf truly restored to society in the sense in which those which claim to educate the deaf exclusively by speech understand the phrase—the perfect ability to communicate by word of mouth with the hearing—and this *restoration* required what was to my mind a greater miracle than the resurrection of Lazarus, or of the daughter of Jairus, or of the son of the widow of Nain. For the *Ephphatha* of the Savior brought about not a mere *restoration* of a condition which had before existed, but called into being a new and wondrous faculty. Not only the physical ear and tongue but also the mind was freed from its shackles, and in an instant, there were acquired the use and comprehension of a complete language (Veditz, 1907:27—emphasis mine).

The provision of ‘language competence’ and of ‘a knowledge of applicability’ by Jesus are both intimately bound up with the needs of a man born deaf or deafened in infancy, with little or no previous exposure to a verbal language. But we should also be clear what they mean in terms of the augmentation of wider humanity implied by Transhumanist ideology. If the deaf man had either never heard nor spoken language before or had lost his hearing so early that he had never gained competence with verbal language, the terminology of ‘restoration’ is itself rendered deeply problematic; Veditz’s first use of the term to denote this miracle in the above quotation is fatally undermined by the second use where he explicitly states that this particular healing was “not a mere restoration of a condition which had before existed”. In our 2016 article on how the New Testament shaped the deaf people of Victorian London, we referred to the man being augmented “to the max” by Jesus, but did not define his augmentation or explore its meaning (Lyons, 2016:185-86). The mind of the deaf man of Mark 7.32-37 was instantaneously altered by the incorporation of Veditz’s “new and wondrous faculty” within it, a transformative occurrence which provided him with these knowledges in a way never before witnessed in human history (or so the Gospels imply). It is the significance of this action and its implications for Transhumanist ideology that should cause us to think further about the

ministry of the earthly Jesus and the potential role of certain of his healing miracles in discussions, especially Christian ones, about the future of an enhanced humanity.

3. The Jesus Seminar and the ubiquity of psychosomatic forms of healing

We now turn to examine two more of Jesus's healing miracles, those involving Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10.46-52) and an unnamed blind man (John 9.1-41). Utilising the insights of Williams and Veditz, we suggest that these texts should also be understood as involving augmentation of the person involved to a new state of being and not as involving restoration to a previously-enjoyed sighted state. The fact that the unnamed man of John 9 is explicitly described as being blind from birth (9.1; τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς) should perhaps have made at least part of this argument unnecessary, and yet Lexicon Liddell-Scott-Jones, a comprehensive Lexicon for those working with the New Testament, includes ἀνέβλεψα in John 9.11 within the category "recover one's sight" without any explanation as to why (Liddell et al, 1940:99)!

Until relatively recently biblical scholars have tended to focus on the historicity of the miracles, a concern which obviously reflects longstanding Enlightenment concerns. While viewing these miracles as fictional stories does not in itself render them useless for Transhumanist purposes, as we will see later, consideration of these texts within the historicising discussions of New Testament scholarship has led to an interpretative trend in which the healing of those with a condition from birth is virtually translated out of existence. We need to begin, therefore, by examining and critiquing one of the more egregious examples of this trend, the sceptical work of the Fellows of The Jesus Seminar.

In *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* (1998), the views of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar on Jesus' miracles as acts of healing are summarised; Jesus' words had already been covered in an earlier volume, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993). On page 531, the ancient understanding of Jesus as a healer is briefly mentioned, before it is explained that the Seminar "had difficulty in finding stories it believed to be reports of actual cures". Nevertheless, six healings are listed that the Seminar's 'coloured beads' voting methodology had rendered as 'pink', a colour colloquially defined as: "[t]his information is probably reliable. It fits well with other evidence that is verifiable" (Funk, 1998:36); a second, more formal definition on the same page reads: "I would include this narrative information with reservations (or modifications) in the database for determining who Jesus was." The six listed are:

1. the curing of Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mk 1.29-31);
2. the curing of a skin rash (Mk. 1.40-45), defined, not as leprosy (i.e., Hansen's disease) but as "some form of dermatitis" (cf. Funk, 1998:62);
3. the curing of a paralytic (Mk 2.1-12);
4. the curing of a woman with a haemorrhage (Mk 5.24b-34);
5. the curing of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26); and

6. the curing of Blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10.46-52//Lk. 18.35-43) (Funk, 1998:531).²

Notably the healing of the deaf man of Mark 7.32-37 is absent from the list.

Of these six, only the first is unequivocally viewed by the Seminar as a historical event: “The Fellows believe that Jesus actually cured Peter’s mother-in-law....” The rest are introduced with less assurance: Jesus “probably cured someone with skin rash”; he “may well have cured a paralytic”; “it is entirely plausible that Jesus cured some woman who was afflicted with a vaginal haemorrhage”; and “Jesus might have caused a blind man to see” (Mk 8.22-26 and 10.46-52//Lk. 18.35-43). Regardless of such ‘hedging’, all are described as being “[f]rom today’s perspective,... related to psychosomatic maladies”, a conclusion which serves to defuse for the Seminar’s Fellows the troubling notion that these healings were supernatural in origin (all quotations from Funk 1998:531).

It is the Jesus Seminar’s invocation of psychosomatic maladies which has important implications for our current investigation. Psychosomatic illnesses are not understood by medical science to be present from birth. Instead they arise from an interaction between body and mind in response as the individual moves through their life (cf. e.g., Kumar & Clark, 2016:899). The fever of Simon’s mother-in-law and the discharge of the woman over twelve years are obviously post-natal. The origins of the skin disease and paralysis are perhaps ambiguous, but can be set aside for now; if this article’s arguments are not dismissed out of hand, these cures can be examined in detail later. Instead we wish to concentrate upon the question of *when exactly* the man of Bethsaida in Mark 8.22-26 and Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10.46-52 became blind. For the Jesus Seminar, seeing psychosomatic illness as the only possible causal explanation for their blindness, means that these historical individuals can only have lost their sight sometime after birth. Echoing the import of the words of the 1989 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the Seminar’s translations as they are published in *The Acts of Jesus* make the impact of this assumption on their work abundantly clear:

Mk 8.24-25: “when his sight began to come back [ἀναβλέψας – NRSV; ‘he looked up’]... his sight was restored [ἀπεκατέστη] and he saw [ἐνέβλεπεν] everything clearly” (Funk, 1998:103).

Mk 10.51-52: “Rabbi I want to see again [ἀναβλέπω]...right away he regained his sight [ἀνέβλεψεν]...” (Funk, 1998:118).³

Both of these men regain sight that they had previously possessed and then somehow lost.

We should note for the sake of completeness that healings of other blind men are also mentioned in the canonical Gospels and these are discussed by the Fellows of the Jesus

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² According to the Seminar, the framework around Luke 18.35-43 is to be coloured “gray”, but “the rest follows Mark closely enough to warrant a pink designation” (Funk, 1998:334).

³ Cf. Lk. 18.41,43: “Master I want to see again [ἀναβλέπω]...right there and then he regained his sight (ἀνέβλεψεν)...” (Funk, 1998:334).

Seminar. All are viewed negatively, however. The healings of two blind men in Matthew 9.27-31 (Funk, 1998:186-87) and in Matthew 20.29-34 (Funk, 1998:229) are regarded as a Matthean fiction and as a Matthean modification of Mark 10.46-52 respectively. Jesus's general words to the Baptist via his disciples about the "blind" being able "to see again" (Matt. 11.5//Lk. 7.22) are seen by the Seminar as being derived from prophetic texts and hence are coloured black, are considered inauthentic (Funk et al, 1993:177). In *The Acts of Jesus*, the Fellows also colour the story of the man born blind in John 9.1-41 "black", with the use of 'mud' alone being coloured "gray" (Funk, 1998:404), defined colloquially earlier in the book as "[t]he information is possible but unreliable. It lacks supporting evidence" (Funk, 1998:37). Possible links with the blind men in Mark 8 and 10 are also discussed, before it is concluded that "the core of the story... might well have been coloured pink had the author not so completely adapted it to the controversy in which it is now embedded" (Funk, 1998:404). The significance of the man's being born blind—whether for John's theology of light and dark (cf. e.g., Lincoln, 2000:96-105) or for the question under consideration here—are left undiscussed, but viewing John 9 as largely 'black', as inauthentic, meant that the Fellows felt under no pressure to consider the implications of Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth.

4. Blind Bartimaeus and the limits of the psychosomatic explanation

Were we to accept the Jesus Seminar's contention that the blindness of the two historical figures in Mark 8 and 10 was post-natal and psychosomatic in origin and that the man blind from birth in John 9.1-41 was a fictional, indeed a nonsensical, character, our ability to reflect the insights of Transhumanism onto these texts would be heavily constrained; we might be tempted to join with the interlocutors mentioned by Karen Lebacqz in consigning these texts, along with the other restorative healing miracles, to the dustbin of the Transhumanism argument. However, the Jesus Seminar's description of Bartimaeus in Mark 10.46-52 as blind due to a post-natal psychosomatic cause at least is not without its problems.

We can uncover the issues within the Jesus Seminar's reasoning by comparing their translations of these two texts to how they were rendered in the 1971 Second Edition of the Revised Standard Version (RSV). There we can see that the translation of Mark 10.51-52 reads very differently to that offered by the Jesus Seminar:

Jesus Seminar; Mk 10.51-52: "Rabbi I want to see again [ἀναβλέψω]...right away he regained his sight [ἀνέβλεψεν]..." (Funk, 1998:118).

RSV; Mk 10.51-52: "Master, let me receive my sight [ἀναβλέψω]..... immediately he received his sight [ἀνέβλεψεν]..."⁴

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⁴ Cf. also the RSV of Lk. 18.41,43: "Lord, let me receive my sight [ἀναβλέψω]..... immediately he received his sight [ἀνέβλεψεν]..." ..."

For the RSV, Bartimaeus does not regain his sight as a consequence of his healing; he receives it. With Mark 8.24-25, however, the RSV translation matches that of the Jesus Seminar rather more closely:

Jesus Seminar; Mk 8.24-25: “when his sight began to come back [ἀναβλέψας]...his sight was restored [ἀπεκατέστη] and he saw [ἐνέβλεπεν] everything clearly” (Funk, 1998:103).

RSV; Mk 8.24-25: “he looked up [ἀναβλέψας]... and was restored [ἀπεκατέστη] and saw [ἐνέβλεπεν] everything clearly.”

There is a fundamental difference between the Greek of these two texts, the appearance of ἀπεκατέστη in Mark 8.25, derived from ἀποκαθίστημι (BDAG, 2001:100), and unambiguously meaning “to restore, to re-establish” (BDAG, 2001:111-12; cf. e.g., Acts 1.6; Ex 4.7; Lev. 13.16); the blind man of Bethsaida can only be viewed as someone who had been restored to a previous sighted condition. This would then explain why he is recorded as describing the men that he sees after Jesus’ first attempt to heal him as looking like “trees walking around” (Mark 8.24); how, we might reasonably ask, could a man born blind have formulated such a visually-based description while still unable to see clearly?

It is the absence of ἀπεκατέστη in Mark 10.51-52 that opens up the possibility that Bartimaeus was blind from birth. The verb used to indicate the regaining of or receiving of sight in these two passages is ἀναβλέπω, a word defined by BDAG in three different ways: (i) “to look up”; (ii) “to regain sight”; and (iii) “to receive sight” (BDAG, 2001:59). The first meaning can be seen in the RSV and NRSV’s rendering of Mark 8:24a as “he looked up”. The Jesus Seminar’s rendering of that same word as “when his sight began to come back” introduces BDAG’s second meaning, to ‘regain sight’. This meaning is applied by the Seminar to each occurrence of ἀναβλέπω in the Gospels, with Jesus’s words to the Baptist in Matthew 11.5//Luke 7.22 being translated as “the blind see again” (τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν) and the descriptions of the post-healing sight of the man in John 9.1-41 being rendered as “restored” (John 9.7) or “recovered” (John 9.18; Funk, 1998:402-04). Somewhat surprisingly, BDAG not only adds Matthew 11.5//Luke 7.22 to the category of “to regain sight”, it also adds Mark 10.51//Luke 18:41ff to that category, seemingly echoing the work of Jesus Seminar (BDAG, 2001:59). In contrast, the RSV translation of these texts consistently uses BDAG’s third option, “to receive sight”.

A selection of BDAG’s illustrative examples show that ἀναβλέπω may comfortably possess either the second or third meanings, with the context usually clarifying which meaning should apply. The second meaning, to regain sight, is usually signalled by an explicit mention of sight being lost. In Aristophanes’ play, *Plutus* (= ‘Wealth’, c. 380BCE), the eponymous god of wealth describes himself to the Athenian house-owner who has taken him in, Chremylus, as having been blinded by Zeus when he, as a young god, threatened to give wealth only to “the just, the wise, the men of ordered life” (τοὺς δικαίους καὶ σοφοὺς καὶ κοσμίους; lines 89-

90)(Aristophanes, 2002:436-37). On hearing that the god is frightened of Zeus, Chremylus, decrying the indiscriminate dispersal of wealth that has resulted from his blindness, exclaims: “Do you think Zeus’ rule and all his thunderbolts would be worth a dime if you regained your sight even for a moment?” (οἷε γὰρ εἶναι τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα καὶ τοὺς κεραυνοὺς ἀξίους τριωβόλου, ἐὰν ἀναβλέψῃς σὺ κἂν σμικρὸν χρόνον;) (Aristophanes, 2002:440-41).⁵ Other examples of regained sight include Tobit 14.2: “He was fifty-eight years old when he lost his sight, and after eight years he regained it” (καὶ ἦν ἐτῶν πεντηκονταοκτώ, ὅτε ἀπώλεσε τὰς ὄψεις, καὶ μετὰ ἔτη ὀκτὼ ἀνέβλεψε.) Similarly, Ananias addresses the now-sightless Saul in Acts 9.17 thus: “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθεῖς σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἣ ἦρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῇς πνεύματος ἁγίου).

BDAG’s third meaning, that of receiving sight for the first time, appears in Pausanias’ *Description of Greece* (c. 2nd century CE). The seer, Ophionieus, described as “blind from birth” (τὸν ἐκ γενετῆς τυφλόν), is said to have “received his sight in the most remarkable way. He was seized with a violent pain in the head, and thereupon received his sight” (ἀναβλέψαι παραλόγως δὴ μάλιστα ἀνθρώπων: ἐπέλαβε γὰρ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἄλγῃμα αὐτὸν ἰσχυρόν, καὶ ἀνέβλεψεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ; 4.12.10) (Pausanias, 1989:240-41). Alongside Pausanias, BDAG includes “J 9.11, 15, 18” (BDAG, 2001:59); these references are to the man of John 9, who is similarly described as having been “blind from birth” (John 9.1; τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς). When asked how he had been healed, the man replies: “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Silo’am and wash’; so I went and washed and received my sight (ἀνέβλεψα)” (v.11). In v. 15, the verb appears again when the Pharisees ask the man how he received his sight” (ἀνέβλεψεν). Finally, the verb appears twice in v. 18 when the Jews who did not believe he had been blind and “had received his sight” (ἀνέβλεψεν) interrogate the parents of the man “who had received his sight” (ἀναβλέψαντος). Remarkably, as was mentioned earlier, Liddell-Scott-Jones adds “Ev. Jo. 9.11” to the category of “recover one’s sight” despite the explicit statement that the man had been blind from birth (Liddell et al, 1940:99).

Given the lack of an explicit statement in Mark 10.46-52 about sight loss, the origin and cause of Bartimaeus’ blindness resist definitive answers. Need we conclude that ἀναβλέπω can only mean ‘received sight’ when paired with ‘blind from birth’? Logically such a position should also mean that we can only render that term as ‘regained sight’ if post-natal loss is explicitly mentioned, e.g., as with Plutus, Tobit, and Saul. BDAG’s decision to add ἀναβλέπω in Mark 10.51 to the category of “regaining of one’s sight” and the Jesus Seminar’s translation of that word as “he regained his sight” are both unexplained acts of interpretation. Save for one

⁵ Later on in the play, Plutus is healed by Asclepius (729-47)(Aristophanes, 2002:530-33).

piece of evidence, previously unnoticed and undiscussed, to which we will return in our conclusion, there is nothing in Mark 10.46-52 to indicate that Bartimaeus was previously sighted, that he had not been born blind. It seems reasonable, especially in light of the man explicitly described as being blind from birth in John 9.1-41 and of Williams and Veditz's interpretation of the deaf man in Mark 7.32-37, to take a different line, to regard Bartimaeus as a man whose blindness was from birth and not psychosomatic in origin. Needless to say, the act of reflecting Transhumanist ideology upon these verses is also suggestive of such a reading of the story of Blind Bartimaeus.

5. What would it mean for a man 'born blind' to be healed?

Since we have rejected the view that Blind Bartimaeus' condition was acquired post-natally and along with it the psychosomatic cause favoured by the Jesus Seminar, we need to examine recent changes in scholarly attitudes towards miracles. In his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), for example, N.T. Wright concludes his discussion of miracles with a three-fold suggestion as to how to view them in the light of their role in Jesus's ministry. His second and third elements are that the Gospels' understanding of miracles arose among those who saw them and among the earliest story-tellers, and that the themes of prophecy and fulfilment clothing them belong to that period respectively. It is Wright's first element that is of interest to us, however. Having earlier disavowed a supernatural worldview (Wright, 1996:187), he writes that:

[m]any scholars from widely different backgrounds now accept that Jesus did remarkable 'mighty works'; this consensus is strong enough to sustain the point at least that Jesus' contemporaries, friend and foe alike, believed him to be doing such things and that the best and simplest explanation of this is to accept that it was more or less true (Wright, 1996:194).

Ultimately, it is not absolutely necessary for us to accept a historicist view of the healing event related in Mark 10.46-52 and certainly not of that found in John 9.1-41. These accounts remain of interest to the Transhumanists as long as they can be plausibly discussed in terms of possible forms of healing and their implications. With this in mind then, what would a man born blind actually experience when he "receives sight"?

In a letter to the English philosopher, John Locke (1632-1704), dated 7th July 1688, the Irish writer William Molyneux (1656-1698) described a thought experiment which was explicitly tied to the relationship between touch and sight:⁶

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⁶ For a broader discussion of Molyneux's problem, see, e.g., M. Degenaar & G.-J. Lokhorst, 'Molyneux's Problem', in E.N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014); <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/molyneux-problem/>; and Menno Lievers, 'Molyneux problem', in Tim Crane ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* (2018) (<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/molyneux-problem/v-1>).

A Man, being born blind, and having a Globe and a Cube, nigh of the same bignes, Committed into his Hands, and being taught or Told, which is Called the Globe, and which the Cube, so as easily to distinguish them by his Touch or Feeling; Then both being taken from Him, and Laid on a Table, Let us Suppose his Sight Restored to Him; Whether he Could, by his Sight, and before he touch them, know which is the Globe and which the Cube? Or Whether he Could know by his Sight, before he stretch'd out his Hand, whether he Could not Reach them, tho they were Removed 20 or 1000 feet from Him? (Molyneux, 1688).

Locke answered no, arguing that the mental connection between a shape known through touch and a shape known through sight developed through lived experience (Locke, 1689). Others such as Edward Synge (Synge, 1695) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (Leibniz, 1865:136-38) argued yes, arguing that such knowledge was innate.

In the present day, Molyneux's problem has been effectively solved. There are individuals blind from birth whose conditions mean that they can be given sight through surgical procedures, either through the removal of cataracts or the treatment of "corneal opacities". In the West, such individuals are usually treated at an early age, but elsewhere in the world treatment may be delayed until early adulthood. In 2011, an article by Richard Held *et al* described an experiment carried out on five individuals in India (Held et al, 2011). These ranged in age from eight to seventeen. Within forty-eight hours of surgery, the subjects were tested in three different ways. From a set of twenty objects, the subjects handled or looked at one object and then identified it by choosing from one of two offered objects, one matching and one dissimilar. Objects handled and then picked out through touch were correctly identified in 98% of cases. Those viewed by sight were identified correctly by sight in 92% of cases. When forms were handled and then chosen by sight, however, the proportion identified correctly fell to 58%, only just above chance. The researchers concluded that:

[t]he newly sighted subjects did not exhibit an immediate transfer of their tactile shape knowledge to the visual domain.... Whatever linkage between vision and touch may pre-exist concomitant exposure of both senses, it is insufficient for reconciling the identity of the separate sensory representations. However, this ability can apparently be acquired after short real-world experiences [based on tests carried out 5 days later] (Held et al, 2011:552).

This may sound like a technical problem, something unlikely to be disruptive in everyday life. In a *New Yorker* article, however, Patrick House described a video from the experiment—shown to him by one of the researchers involved, Dr Pawan Sinha—in which the bandages were removed and the patient, a boy, saw for the first time:

The boy sits still and blinks silently, the room around him reflecting in his eyes as a kind of proof of their new transparency. Sinha believes these first moments for the newly sighted are blurry, incoherent, and saturated by brightness—like walking into daylight with dilated pupils—and swirls of colour that do not make sense as shapes or faces or any kind of object. "The moments immediately following bandages removal are not quite as 'magical' as Hollywood movies would have us believe," Sinha told me (House, 2014).

House concluded: “To answer Molyneux, then: No. A cube and a sphere are lost in this confusion” (House, 2014). Clearly, a period of adjustment exists between sightlessness and effective sight as the brain makes sense of the new information being received.

6. Conclusion: The significance of the lack of an adjustment period

Comparing the experimental data described by Held et al with the behaviours immediately ascribed to historical figure of Bartimaeus in Mark 10.46-52 and to the fictitious unnamed man in John 9.1-41 suggests that, just as with the deaf man in Mark 7.32-37, something would have had to have happened to these men that went far beyond the miraculous healing of their eyes for these accounts to ring true to contemporary exegetes informed by Transhumanist concerns. In Mark 10.52, Bartimaeus is said to have received his sight “immediately” (εὐθὺς) and then “followed him [Jesus] on his way” (ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.). In John 9.7, the man follows Jesus’ instruction to wash and comes back “seeing” (βλέπων), quickly becoming embroiled in conversations with onlookers and authorities. Neither appears to require a significant period of adjustment while they adjust to their new condition as sighted-individuals; just as with the deaf man of Mark 7, their mental processes appear to have been enhanced by Jesus with instantaneous effect; a new thing has been added to them to help them leap from blind to sighted without delay. As a consequence of each of these three healing miracles, understood in the light of Transhumanist ideas, the humanity portrayed has effectively become a new thing, something which should be of great interest to such as Karen Lebacqz. Equally, viewing these texts in this way also makes very clear how the imposition of modern assumptions about healings being essentially restorative in nature by the Jesus Seminar, by Collins, and by Lane, has often served to flatten biblical texts that are in fact capable of offering richer portraits of humanity than has hitherto been recognised.

7. A postscript addressed to the Christian Transhumanists

Mention was made earlier of a new piece of evidence concerning Bartimaeus’ blindness, one absent from previous literature. *PACE* the interpretation offered here, it might be argued that the immediacy of his acquisition of sight suggests that Bartimaeus had experienced sight before, that he was not blind from birth. Of course, this would minimise the miracle performed by Jesus, perhaps moving us back towards the miracle-lite territory of the Jesus Seminar. We prefer to keep the miracle large, however, not least for the benefit of the Transhumanists interested in what biblical texts may offer them in terms of inspiration or, as in this case, warning. In Mark 10.51 Jesus seeks permission from Bartimaeus before he does anything for him, asking “what do you want me to do for you” (Τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω;)? In stark contrast, the man of John 9 was healed without any question ever being asked of him. When talking

about the healings of Jesus and any lessons for the augmentation of human beings, the difference between these two accounts in terms of permission asked is of fundamental importance.

We tend to assume that modern technological advances can be easily rejected by those physically affected. But even a brief consideration of, say, cochlear implants in babies shows that this is not always so. Decisions about what is best for human beings are often understood as taking place amongst those most qualified to make such judgements; commentators on John 9 do not question the propriety of Jesus's action, though perhaps they should. Plans about human enhancement are often far-reaching, under-theorised, and lacking in ethical reflection. They may be carried out by zealots convinced of the normative nature of their vision of humanity, conform us to a normative template, with physical and neurological biodiversity inevitably being reduced as a result. Given broad and growing interest in human augmentation across the modern world today, there is perhaps no compelling reason why Jesus and his non-restorative acts of healing should come to play a significant role in discussions about Transhumanism, even among Christians. Equally, however, there is no compelling reason as to why he should not become a vocal champion of human enhancement if those involved find his involvement useful. In arguing for Blind Bartimaeus to join the man of John 9 as blind from birth though, we find it pleasing that the Gospels can bring something more to the table than a Jesus uncritically supportive of destroying biodiversity without asking for permission; they can also bring to the discussion a Jesus who is capable of hearing the wishes of those whose bodies and minds are often all too quickly slated for destruction; those who are blind and the deaf do not always dream of sight and sound as the sighted and hearing so complacently, and wantonly, believe.

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