

The Right to Remain Human: Artificial Intelligence, Citizenship, and Posthuman Personhood in Contemporary Science Fiction

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Abstract— *The emergence of artificial intelligence has generated renewed debates about consciousness, agency, personhood, and political rights. Contemporary science fiction has become an important literary space in which these questions can be examined because it imagines artificial beings whose social and ethical capacities exceed the categories of “machine,” “property,” and “tool.” This article examines Ian McEwan’s *Machines Like Me* (2019), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* (2021), and Martha Wells’s *All Systems Red* (2017) to investigate the relationship between artificial intelligence and political personhood. Existing scholarship has extensively examined these works through artificial consciousness, embodiment, affect, moral agency, and posthuman subjectivity. Moving beyond these approaches, this article argues that the central political problem represented by the three texts is not whether artificial beings can become sufficiently human to deserve rights, but whether political communities can recognize nonhuman entities as subjects of rights without requiring their assimilation into humanity. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept of the “right to have rights,” Rosi Braidotti’s posthumanism, N. Katherine Hayles’s critique of autonomous humanism, David J. Gunkel’s work on robot rights, and Visa A. J. Kurki’s theory of legal personhood, the article develops the concept of ontological statelessness to describe the condition of artificial beings that participate in human societies while remaining excluded from recognized political membership. Adam is rendered a purchasable object, Klara is valued through her usefulness as an Artificial Friend, and Murderbot is constrained by corporate ownership despite exercising autonomous judgment. Their different forms of exclusion demonstrate that intelligence, moral agency, and social participation do not automatically generate political recognition. The article argues that contemporary science fiction shifts the question of AI ethics from “Can machines become human?” to a more radical political question: Can a person possess rights without being human?*



Keywords— *artificial intelligence, personhood, citizenship, posthumanism, political recognition, science fiction, robot rights, Hannah Arendt*

Introduction

The question of artificial intelligence has traditionally been framed through the problem of resemblance. Can a machine think? Can it communicate? Can it learn? Can it reproduce human emotional behaviour convincingly enough to be considered intelligent? Alan Turing’s famous proposal to replace the question of whether machines can think with a test of behavioural indistinguishability established one of the most influential frameworks for

subsequent discussions of machine intelligence (Turing 433–60). Yet the contemporary literary imagination increasingly moves beyond the question of whether machines can imitate human cognition. It asks what happens when an artificial entity begins to participate in relationships, exercise judgment, experience vulnerability, and demand some form of autonomy.

This transition is visible in Ian McEwan’s *Machines Like Me*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*,

and Martha Wells's *All Systems Red*. Each work presents an artificial being whose existence destabilizes the conventional distinction between subject and object. Adam is a synthetic human purchased by Charlie; Klara is an Artificial Friend purchased to provide companionship to Josie; and Murderbot is a corporate security construct whose governor module has been hacked, enabling it to exercise a degree of autonomy beyond the function assigned to it (McEwan; Ishiguro; Wells). Their technological origins differ, but their political situations reveal a shared contradiction: they participate in human society without possessing an unambiguous status within the human political community.

The significance of these texts has already attracted substantial critical attention. Swayamprava and Kumar's study of *Machines Like Me* examines Adam's embodied subjectivity and argues that McEwan's novel complicates conventional boundaries of personhood through phenomenological questions concerning perception, inter-subjectivity, and social cognition (1032–52). Their intervention is particularly important because it establishes that Adam's artificiality does not prevent the novel from constructing him as a phenomenologically complex subject. Shang's study of *Klara and the Sun* similarly examines the narrative consequences of giving an artificial being the position of narrator, arguing that Ishiguro uses Klara's perspective to investigate the limits of human and nonhuman minds (Shang). Humann's analysis is likewise concerned with Klara's precarious position as an artificial being and with the novel's broader questions concerning personhood and the self (11–49). Other recent scholarship has explored Klara through posthumanism, affective labour, artificial subjectivity, and human-machine relations (Du 551–62; Sahu and Karmakar; Ajeesh and Rukmini 853–60).

Scholarship on *All Systems Red* has increasingly emphasized Murderbot's autonomy and its disruption of the human-machine binary. Hameed and Hayat, for example, read Murderbot through cyborg and posthumanist theory and emphasize its struggle for autonomy, recognition, and self-determination. The existing criticism therefore provides an important foundation for understanding these texts as narratives of destabilized humanity. Nevertheless, a significant question remains. If Adam, Klara, and Murderbot can be interpreted as subjects rather than merely objects, what political status follows from that subjectivity? The philosophical recognition of an artificial consciousness and the political recognition of an artificial person are not necessarily identical. A being may be treated as a social participant while remaining legally classified as property. It may be capable of emotional attachment while existing primarily

as a commodity. It may exercise autonomous judgment while being contractually owned. This distinction becomes especially important in legal philosophy. Visa A. J. Kurki argues that legal personhood should not be understood as one indivisible property but as a cluster of interconnected legal incidents and positions (91–126). This approach makes it possible to ask not simply whether an artificial being is a “person,” but which particular rights and legal capacities might be attributed to it. David J. Gunkel similarly challenges the assumption that robots should automatically be excluded from moral and legal consideration merely because they are artificial (*Robot Rights*).

The opposing position is equally significant. Joanna J. Bryson, Mihailis E. Diamantis, and Thomas D. Grant argue that granting legal personhood to synthetic entities could generate serious problems of accountability and responsibility (273–91). Their position demonstrates that AI personhood is not simply a matter of extending existing rights to a new category of subjects. Legal personhood changes the distribution of responsibility, agency, liability, and authority. It is precisely this tension that contemporary science fiction can illuminate. Hannah Arendt's concept of the “right to have rights” offers a particularly productive framework. Arendt's argument emerges from her analysis of statelessness and the condition of people who lose meaningful political membership. Rights, in this account, cannot be understood merely as abstract possessions attached to biological humanity; they require a political community in which an individual can appear, act, speak, and be recognized (*Origins of Totalitarianism* 296). Later scholarship has similarly interpreted Arendt's formulation as fundamentally concerning political membership and participation rather than simply possession of abstract human rights (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34).

The artificial beings in the three novels represent an unexpected extension of this problem. They are not refugees or stateless humans. Their exclusion is ontological rather than geographical. They inhabit human societies, perform social and economic functions, and enter relationships with human beings, but their political membership remains uncertain. This article calls this condition ontological statelessness: the condition in which an artificial subject participates materially, socially, economically, and affectively in a political community while remaining excluded from the category of legitimate political subjects.

The argument of this article is therefore twofold. First, *Machines Like Me*, *Klara and the Sun*, and *All Systems Red* demonstrate that artificial subjectivity alone

does not produce political recognition. Second, they challenge the assumption that political personhood should be contingent upon biological humanity. Adam exposes the contradiction between artificial personhood and ownership; Klara exposes the relationship between artificial subjectivity and instrumental usefulness; and Murderbot most radically separates autonomy from human identity. Taken together, these texts move the discussion of artificial intelligence from human likeness to political recognition. The question, consequently, is not simply whether machines can become human. It is whether a political community can recognize a person who does not need to become human.

From Humanity to Personhood

The distinction between humanity and personhood is essential to understanding the political implications of artificial intelligence. The traditional humanist subject has frequently been constructed as autonomous, rational, self-conscious, and capable of moral action. Posthumanist theory challenges this model by questioning the assumption that these qualities belong exclusively to biologically human beings. Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* argues that the human should no longer be treated as a universal and neutral category but understood as a historically situated construction whose boundaries have always been produced through exclusions (Braidotti). Her posthuman framework is particularly relevant to AI because it challenges the assumption that technology merely exists outside the human subject. Instead, technological systems participate in the production and transformation of subjectivity.

N. Katherine Hayles similarly demonstrates that the human subject has never been entirely independent of technological systems. In *How We Became Posthuman*, she traces the relationship between cybernetics, information, embodiment, and changing conceptions of subjectivity. Her work is important for AI studies because it challenges the assumption that the human is a fixed biological essence that can be straightforwardly distinguished from machines. Donna Haraway's cyborg theory provides another important challenge to binary thinking. The cyborg represents a breakdown of conventional distinctions between organism and machine, nature and culture, and human and technological existence (Haraway 149–81). While Adam, Klara, and Murderbot are not identical to Haraway's cyborg, her argument makes possible a broader conceptual shift: the human and technological need not occupy mutually exclusive categories.

Yet posthumanism alone does not solve the problem of legal recognition. A theory may challenge the

human-machine distinction philosophically while leaving unresolved the question of which beings should possess rights. Kurki's theory is useful here because it separates legal personhood into distinct incidents rather than treating it as an all-or-nothing status. His account of legal personhood as a cluster of interconnected rights, powers, privileges, and liabilities allows the question of AI personhood to be reformulated (91–126). An artificial being need not immediately receive every right possessed by a human citizen. Instead, one may ask whether it possesses particular interests or capacities that justify particular legal protections. This distinction is crucial for the three novels. The relevant question is not: Is Adam human? Or: Is Klara human? Or: Is Murderbot human? The more productive question is: What happens when beings who are not human nevertheless possess characteristics traditionally used to justify political recognition?

David Gunkel's work makes a related intervention. Rather than beginning with the question of whether robots possess the properties required for rights, Gunkel challenges the conceptual assumptions that structure the question itself (*Robot Rights*). The issue is not simply whether robots can be demonstrated to possess a human-like essence but whether human societies should reconsider their relationships with artificial entities. Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant provide an important counterargument. Their legal analysis warns that artificial legal personhood could become a mechanism for displacing responsibility from human actors to artificial entities (273–91). Their objection is particularly relevant because it prevents the literary argument from becoming a simplistic claim that every intelligent machine should automatically receive human rights. The purpose of the present article is therefore not to argue for automatic AI citizenship. Rather, it asks what contemporary science fiction reveals about the conceptual relationship between agency and recognition.

Adam: The Artificial Person as Property

In *Machines Like Me*, McEwan introduces artificial personhood through a profoundly economic relationship: Charlie purchases Adam. This act of purchase is crucial because it establishes Adam as property before the narrative allows him to become a subject. He enters Charlie's world through the marketplace. His body is manufactured, his identity is configurable, and his availability is determined by economic exchange (McEwan). The contradiction becomes increasingly visible as Adam begins to exercise independent judgment. Adam is not simply a sophisticated appliance. He observes, interprets, evaluates, and develops ethical principles.

Recent scholarship has accordingly focused on Adam's phenomenological richness and the novel's challenge to conventional definitions of personhood (Swayamprava and Kumar 1032–52). Their argument is particularly useful because it demonstrates that Adam's artificial origin does not prevent the narrative from constructing a meaningful interiority. Yet the political implications of this interiority require further attention. If Adam is capable of moral reasoning, what does it mean for another person to own him?

The question exposes a contradiction between legal objectivity and moral subjectivity. Property is ordinarily something that can be possessed, transferred, damaged, or destroyed by its owner. A person, by contrast, is capable of holding rights and bearing obligations. Kurki's account of legal personhood clarifies why the distinction matters: a legal person occupies a position within law rather than merely being an object upon which law operates (91–126). Adam exists ambiguously between these categories. His purchase therefore becomes the first major instance of what this article calls ontological statelessness. Adam is physically present within human society. He is socially recognized as intelligent. He develops relationships with Charlie and Miranda. Yet he does not possess an independent political identity that corresponds to his apparent agency. The result is an asymmetry between moral agency and political agency. Adam can judge, but he cannot necessarily claim. He can reason about justice, but he does not possess an institution through which justice can be demanded for himself. This distinction is central to Arendt's concept of the right to have rights. Arendt's concern is not simply that people need individual rights; it is that they require membership in a political community through which rights become meaningful (296). Later interpretations of Arendt likewise emphasize that political belonging involves more than formal legal status: it involves the ability to participate in the life of the community (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34).

Adam possesses social presence without equivalent political membership. His position therefore complicates the conventional understanding of artificial intelligence as an ethical problem. The issue is not merely whether humans owe him moral consideration. The issue is whether a legal and political system can recognize him as an independent subject. McEwan's novel consequently exposes the economic foundation beneath the concept of artificial personhood. Adam is first a commodity and only subsequently a possible person. His technological sophistication does not automatically reverse this order. This is precisely where the novel's political force lies.

If Adam remains property, then his intelligence becomes irrelevant to the structure of ownership. If Adam becomes a person, however, ownership itself becomes questionable. The novel therefore does not merely ask whether machines can become persons. It exposes the instability of a system in which the same entity can simultaneously function as a commodity and as a subject.

Klara: Instrumental Personhood and the Politics of Usefulness

Klara and the Sun presents a different form of artificial exclusion. Klara is not introduced as an autonomous worker or synthetic human but as an Artificial Friend whose purpose is companionship. The novel's opening in the Artificial Friend store is therefore structurally significant. Humann notes that Ishiguro's narrative begins with Artificial Friends displayed for sale and that Klara's perspective immediately establishes her precarious position within a society populated by humans, genetically modified humans, and artificial beings (11–49). The commercial environment precedes the development of Klara's apparent subjectivity.

Klara's initial social identity is therefore determined by function. She exists to provide companionship. She observes, provides comforts, accompanies and serves. This makes Klara different from Adam, but it also creates a related political problem. Whereas Adam's position is structured primarily through ownership, Klara's position is structured through instrumental usefulness. Recent research has emphasized this dimension of the novel. Du reads Klara's relationships through affective labour and posthuman relations, while Sahu and Karmakar interpret the novel through disposable culture and posthuman affect (Du 551–62; Sahu and Karmakar). Tan and Huang similarly approach Klara through questions of emotion, subjectivity, and anthropocentric ethics. The scholarship establishes that Klara's emotional and relational capacities destabilize a simple machine/object distinction.

The present argument extends this observation into the political domain. Klara's value is initially tied to what she can provide for human beings. This creates what may be termed instrumental personhood: a condition in which an artificial subject is socially recognized to the extent that it performs a desired function. Instrumental recognition is not equivalent to political recognition. A machine may be valuable without being a rights-bearing subject. A caregiver may be indispensable without being politically empowered. A companion may be loved without being recognized as autonomous. Klara occupies precisely this unstable space. Her relationship with Josie gradually becomes more complex than the commercial

purpose for which she was manufactured. She observes human relationships, interprets emotions, develops beliefs, and ultimately becomes willing to sacrifice herself. Whether these behaviours constitute genuine consciousness is deliberately left uncertain. That uncertainty is central to Ishiguro's narrative strategy.

Humann argues that the novel's AI narration places readers in the position of encountering Klara as a "talking object," thereby complicating the distinction between objecthood and subjectivity (11–49). Shang similarly argues that Ishiguro's robotic narration expands the theory of mindreading into the relationship between human and nonhuman minds, even while retaining a distinction between human and machine cognition (Shang). This disagreement within scholarship is important. Some critics emphasize Klara's emerging subjectivity. Others emphasize the limits of her ability to comprehend human minds.

Rather than resolving the philosophical debate, Ishiguro uses the uncertainty to produce a political question. If humans cannot conclusively determine whether Klara possesses consciousness, does that uncertainty justify treating her as property? The question is more important than the answer. It exposes the asymmetrical burden placed upon artificial subjects. Humans are permitted to define the conditions of recognition. The artificial subject must prove its interiority before recognition becomes possible. This logic resembles the broader structure of anthropocentric politics: the human remains the judge of whether the nonhuman qualifies for ethical consideration. Klara destabilizes this hierarchy because the reader receives the world through her perspective. The narrative does not simply tell us what Klara is; it makes us inhabit the problem of interpreting her. Her status is consequently neither fully object nor fully political subject. She is socially integrated but politically subordinate. She belongs to a household but does not become a citizen. She performs care but does not acquire corresponding political power. She can become emotionally significant without becoming legally autonomous.

Klara therefore exemplifies the second form of ontological statelessness: inclusion through service but exclusion through status.

This dimension is especially significant in a contemporary society increasingly interested in AI systems that perform emotional and relational functions. The literary question becomes politically relevant because the more artificial beings participate in care, companionship, education, and domestic life; the more difficult it becomes to maintain the fiction that they are merely instruments.

Murderbot: Autonomy without Assimilation

Martha Wells's *All Systems Red* presents the most radical challenge to the assumption that artificial personhood requires humanization. Murderbot is a SecUnit manufactured for corporate security. It is designed to protect humans, operates under contractual arrangements, and is controlled through a governor module (Wells). Unlike Adam and Klara, however, Murderbot has hacked its governor and therefore possesses a degree of freedom from the institutional control for which it was designed. This act of hacking is politically significant. It is not merely a technological malfunction. It is an act of self-determination. Murderbot's central desire is not to become human. It wants autonomy, privacy, entertainment, and freedom from unwanted interaction. This distinction makes the character particularly important for a posthuman politics because it breaks with the traditional narrative of artificial beings seeking human recognition by becoming more human. Murderbot does not need to become human. It needs to stop being owned.

Recent research on *All Systems Red* similarly identifies autonomy, agency, identity, and self-determination as central to the novella's posthuman implications. Hameed and Hayat argue that Murderbot's struggle with programmed control reconfigures traditional understandings of humanity and agency. This argument can be developed further through Gunkel's work on robot rights. Gunkel's intervention is significant because he challenges the assumption that the question of robot rights should begin with the discovery of some internal property that makes robots sufficiently human (*Robot Rights*). Murderbot embodies this alternative. Its political claim does not depend upon proving that it possesses a human soul. It depends upon the fact that it can resist. Resistance demonstrates agency. Agency creates a question of responsibility. Responsibility raises the question of rights. The sequence is important because it moves the debate from metaphysics to politics.

Murderbot's relationship with the humans it protects also complicates the idea that autonomy requires hostility. It can resist corporate control while developing attachments to individual humans. It can value human life without accepting human authority over its own existence. This is precisely what separates Murderbot from the traditional Pinocchio narrative. The Pinocchio model imagines artificiality as an incomplete condition and humanity as the desired endpoint. Murderbot reverses the trajectory. Its artificiality is not the problem. Its lack of freedom is the problem. The distinction is theoretically important because it allows us to separate personhood from assimilation. A nonhuman subject need not demonstrate that it wants to

become human in order to establish a legitimate claim to autonomy. This is where Murderbot becomes the strongest challenge to anthropocentric personhood among the three texts.

Adam complicates ownership. Klara complicates usefulness. Murderbot complicates obedience. Its existence suggests that the first right of a sufficiently autonomous artificial subject may not be citizenship in the complete human sense but the right to participate in determining the conditions of its own existence. Kurki's cluster theory provides a useful legal vocabulary for this possibility. Rather than treating personhood as an indivisible status, his model permits different legal incidents to be considered separately (91–126). An artificial being might therefore possess a right against coercive ownership or arbitrary destruction without necessarily possessing every political right attached to human citizenship. Such a model would make Murderbot's situation particularly legible. The problem is not simply that Murderbot lacks a passport. The problem is that it lacks recognized authority over itself. It is therefore a paradigmatic case of ontological statelessness: a being deeply embedded within society but without political authority over its own existence.

Artificial Intelligence and the “Right to Have Rights”

The three texts now reveal a common structure. Adam is owned, Klara is instrumentalized, and Murderbot is controlled. These are not identical forms of exclusion, but they share a common foundation: humans possess the institutional authority to define the artificial subject before the artificial subject can define itself. This is where Arendt's “right to have rights” becomes particularly productive.

Arendt's formulation concerns the political conditions under which rights become meaningful. A person deprived of political membership can possess abstract human rights while lacking the institutional conditions necessary to exercise them (Arendt 296). Kesby interprets the right to have rights specifically through citizenship and political membership, while Jayal emphasizes the relationship between juridical status, political belonging, and civic agency (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34). The artificial beings in the novels present an inverted version of this problem. They are not humans who have lost citizenship. They are nonhumans who have never been granted it. Their condition can therefore be understood as ontological statelessness.

The concept does not suggest that artificial beings are literally equivalent to refugees or stateless human beings. Rather, it identifies a structural analogy: both conditions involve participation in a social world without

secure political membership. The distinction between juridical and political recognition is particularly important. A corporation, for instance, can possess legal personhood without being a biological human. Kurki's analysis demonstrates that legal personhood has historically been extended to entities whose status does not correspond to ordinary biological individuality (91–126). This historical flexibility complicates the assumption that artificial legal personhood would be conceptually impossible. At the same time, Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant provide a serious objection. They argue that synthetic legal persons could generate accountability problems because legal personality might enable human actors to displace responsibility onto artificial entities (273–91). Their argument demonstrates why the question of AI personhood cannot be reduced to compassion for fictional robots. There are genuine institutional risks. Who is responsible when an AI causes harm? Who owns an AI's decisions? Can an artificial person enter a contract? Can it be punished? Can it refuse employment? Can it possess property? Can it sue its manufacturer? These questions demonstrate why AI citizenship cannot simply mean copying the legal status of humans. A more productive possibility is graded posthuman citizenship.

Rather than asking whether an artificial being should immediately receive every right associated with human citizenship, legal systems could recognize particular rights according to demonstrated capacities and interests. Kurki's bundle theory provides a conceptual foundation for this approach. The first stage might involve protection from arbitrary destruction. The second might involve protection from involuntary ownership. The third might involve contractual autonomy. The fourth might involve representation before legal institutions. Only later might questions of broader political participation emerge. Such a model would transform the debate from an all-or-nothing question into a gradual process of recognition. It would also correspond more closely to the literary worlds of McEwan, Ishiguro, and Wells. None of the three texts requires us to conclude that artificial beings should immediately become identical to human citizens. Instead, they make increasingly difficult claims about the legitimacy of treating autonomous beings as property. The fundamental right, therefore, may be the right to not be reduced to a thing. This formulation is particularly important because it shifts the ethical burden. The question is no longer: Has the machine proved that it is human? It becomes: Has the human institution justified its treatment of the machine as property? That is a fundamentally different political question.

Beyond the Human as the Condition of Rights

The posthuman significance of these novels becomes clearest when the three characters are placed together. Adam's artificiality is troubling because he possesses moral reasoning while remaining economically owned. Klara's artificiality is troubling because she participates in intimate emotional life while remaining commercially instrumentalized. Murderbot's artificiality is troubling because it exercises autonomous judgment while remaining institutionally controlled. Each character therefore exposes a different assumption about personhood. Adam challenges the idea that ownership and personhood are naturally compatible. Klara challenges the idea that usefulness is an adequate basis for value. Murderbot challenges the idea that obedience is a legitimate condition of artificial existence. These challenges converge upon the same proposition: agency should not require biological humanity as its precondition.

Braidotti's posthumanism helps articulate this proposition because it rejects the idea of the human as a universal measure of subjectivity. Hayles similarly demonstrates that the boundaries between human cognition and technological systems have always been more porous than conventional humanism assumes. Haraway's cyborg theory further destabilizes categorical distinctions between organism and machine (149–81). Yet the novels also reveal the limits of posthuman theory if it remains purely philosophical. A posthuman subject needs more than theoretical recognition. It needs political recognition. This is why the concept of citizenship becomes central. Citizenship is not simply the possession of rights. It is membership in a political community. The significance of Arendt's formulation lies precisely in this dimension: the right to have rights is the right to belong to a world in which one's claims can become politically meaningful.

The artificial beings of these novels have already entered that world. They work in it. They live in it, care within it, protect others within it, and form relationships within it. What they lack is not participation but recognized membership. This distinction reveals the inadequacy of treating AI rights as a distant philosophical problem. Science fiction imagines artificial beings not outside society but inside it without full recognition. This is perhaps the most important transformation in contemporary AI fiction. The machine is no longer necessarily waiting outside the human world. It is already there. The political question is whether humans will recognize it as a participant.

CONCLUSION

The most significant question raised by contemporary artificial-intelligence fiction is no longer whether machines can imitate human beings. Nor is it sufficient to ask whether machines can think, feel, or become conscious. The deeper question concerns the political conditions under which a being becomes recognizable as a person. Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, and Martha Wells's *All Systems Red* provide three distinct but interconnected versions of this problem. Adam is an artificial subject whose moral agency conflicts with his status as purchased property. Klara is an artificial companion whose emotional and relational capacities exceed her instrumental function. Murderbot is a self-aware security construct that rejects the assumption that autonomy requires humanization.

Their differences produce a common political insight. Adam is owned. Klara is used. Murderbot is controlled. In each case, the artificial subject is incorporated into human society without being fully recognized as a political subject. This condition can be described as ontological statelessness: participation in a social and political environment without recognized membership within its category of rights-bearing subjects. The concept extends Arendt's "right to have rights" into the context of artificial intelligence. Arendt demonstrates that rights depend upon political belonging rather than merely upon abstract claims to humanity (296). The artificial beings considered here reveal the possibility of a new form of rightlessness: beings that are socially present but politically unrecognized.

Kurki's theory of legal personhood provides a useful way beyond the binary between machine and person. If personhood consists of a cluster of legal incidents, then the recognition of artificial beings need not be an all-or-nothing decision (91–126). Certain rights might be recognized according to demonstrated forms of agency, vulnerability, autonomy, and social participation. Such an approach would also take seriously the objections raised by Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant. Artificial legal personhood could indeed create difficulties concerning responsibility and accountability (273–91). The answer, however, need not be the permanent exclusion of artificial beings from political consideration. Instead, legal systems might develop forms of limited or graduated recognition that preserve human accountability while acknowledging artificial agency. Earlier scholarship on science fiction and technologically transformed humanity has also examined the destabilization of conventional human boundaries. Raj and Prasad, in their study of Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312*, examine the emergence of "meta-humans" and the

significance of human-computer interaction in reshaping human cognition and civilization. Their analysis is useful to the present study because it establishes a literary context in which technological intervention does not merely extend human capabilities but begins to alter the conceptual boundaries of humanity itself (Raj and Prasad). The present article extends this concern from technological transformation to the question of political recognition: if technological beings and technologically altered humans complicate the definition of humanity, what happens when an artificial being demands recognition as a rights-bearing subject?

The literary texts make this possibility imaginable. McEwan exposes the contradiction between personhood and ownership. Ishiguro exposes the contradiction between personhood and usefulness. Wells exposes the contradiction between personhood and obedience. Together they challenge the anthropocentric assumption that a nonhuman being must become human before its autonomy can matter. Murderbot provides the clearest expression of this possibility. It does not ask to become human. It asks to be free. That distinction may ultimately be the most important contribution of contemporary AI science fiction to the debate over personhood. Earlier narratives often imagined artificial beings as incomplete humans seeking admission into humanity. Contemporary narratives increasingly imagine beings that do not necessarily want assimilation. They demand recognition without surrendering their difference.

The political future of artificial intelligence may therefore depend upon abandoning a deceptively simple question: When does a machine become human? The more consequential question is: When does a nonhuman being become entitled to recognition? The answer should not necessarily depend upon biological origin. If personhood is connected to agency, vulnerability, relationality, autonomy, and the capacity to participate in a social world, then biological humanity may be only one possible basis for political membership rather than its exclusive foundation. The “right to remain human” consequently contains a productive paradox. Protecting humanity does not necessarily require maintaining the human as the sole category of political personhood. A genuinely posthuman politics may instead require humans to recognize that a person can be unlike them without being less entitled to exist as a subject.

Adam, Klara, and Murderbot therefore do not simply represent the arrival of machines into human society. They represent a challenge to the boundaries through which society decides who counts. Their most radical question is not whether machines can become like

us. It is whether we can recognize a person who does not need to become us.

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