

## Towards the Posthuman Here and Now: Posthumanism as a Philosophy of our Time

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### Abstract:

This new monograph by Francesca Ferrando investigates the theoretical and practical implications of onto-epistemological and ethical aspects of the Posthuman condition, supporting it with an updated philosophical frame. Adding to Braidotti's brand of Posthumanism (i.e. mutually converged Post-humanism and Post-anthropocentrism) a third constitutive element – Post-dualism – Ferrando's endeavors map a broad range of markers or conceptual nodes where such a paradigm shift could be employed: namely, from the diagnosis and consequent deconstruction of the humanist exclusivist thinking patterns and even certain recent trends coming from the Transhumanist camp – to the proposal of the multiverse of posthuman possibilities, already experienceable here and now.

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Ferrando, Francesca. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. 271 pages, 110,50 EUR. ISBN: 978-1-350-05950-4.

In her latest monograph *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Francesca Ferrando writes both as a teaching professor and, concurrently, an academic researcher, as her text answers to both of her passions directly and without hesitation: she delineates the field and expands it simultaneously. The rhizomatic structuration – which is established by the network of straightforward and at certain points even (deliberately) provocative questions and subsequent answers that crosslink the entire contents of the book – combines the act of reading a rigorous academic endeavor with the relaxing flavor of a ‘web search’ experience, subtly navigating the conceptual map of an inquisitive 21st Century mind. In this respect, the opening sequence of the book, in the form of a manifesto, “Posthumanism is the philosophy of our time” (p. 1), demonstrates properly Ferrando’s decisive (but no less cautious) embeddedness within the actuality of ‘our’ epoch.

The book opens with Rosi Braidotti’s preface in which she displays a precious advocacy for her former supervisee, emphasizing Ferrando’s affirmative poetical vision that does not dismiss the critico-political approach to the posthuman predicament: “for her, the Posthuman is never post-political, but ever transversal and relational” (xvi). To be sure, there is nothing unexpected in the relational and inclusivist patterns of Ferrando’s reflection, as she puts into constant dialogue the multiplicity of European and non-European traditions, along with the various ‘triadic’ modes, e.g. the “past, present and future” epistemes, “theory”, “poiesis”, and “praxis”; the list goes on (p. 59). Thus, leaning on Braidotti’s take on the *Posthuman* (or *Posthumanism*, both as umbrella terms, intentionally given without a hyphen) as a specific convergence of Post-humanism and Post-anthropocentrism (pref., xi), Ferrando contributes by adding the third member, Post-dualism, making her own research well rounded for the purpose of setting a sustainable philosophy of mediation “which discharges any confrontational dualisms and

hierarchical legacies” (p. 22). While in Braidotti’s derivation Post-humanism is denoted as an undermining of “the humanist tradition based on a generalized and universalized approach to the human” (p. 54), Post-anthropocentrism contests the enduring speciesist and/or supremacist schemes underlying Western scholarship from Plato to Linneaus (pp. 93-97). Consistently, the post-dualistic stance is based on a detection of almost infinite chains of dichotomies that follow the consequent logic of identity formations (man/woman, human/animal, human/machine, etc.), in other words it tends to problematize an all-pervasive binary mindset in which difference remains an ultimately hierarchical proposition (pp. 60-61). In order to dismantle such exclusivist framework, Ferrando rather opts for the concept of human “as an open signifier”, both in the manner of its historical actualization and its prospective capacities (p. 99).

The two aspects of the first part (“What is Philosophical Posthumanism?”) are particularly notable, since they situate the field in both a temporal and conceptual manner. The first one is the notion of Anthropocene, a descriptive critical signification of the present era in which heavy human impact operates as a geological force (further examined in pt. 2, pp. 103-108). Ferrando locates her work historically as “the philosophical approach which suits the informal geological time of the Anthropocene” (p. 22), fully aware of a potential reading of this indication as inherently anthropocentric. The next aspect, however, draws a clear conceptual demarcation from Transhumanism (whose central goals are promoted as human enhancement, mind uploading, CRISPR gene editing, et sim.), which finds its roots in the age of Enlightenment and, as Ferrando points out, embraces the humanist tradition with a significant lack of critical engagement (pp. 33-34).

Furthermore, the most striking component of the book’s middle part (“Of Which “Human” Is the Posthuman a “Post”?”) is the feasibility study of the prefix ‘post’ with its hyphen ‘-’, and the term ‘humanizing’, as critical resources for posthuman scholarship. Accordingly, the notion of ‘human’ is considered to be processual, thus showing the conceptual kinship with feminisms from de Beauvoir and Irigaray to Haraway and Butler, referring to the constructionist and performative features of the practice of humanizing (pp. 68-72).

The concluding part of the monograph (“Have Humans Always been Posthuman?”) is mainly invested in mapping the post-dualist ontologies through the various transdisciplinary strategies

that solidly underpin such an intent. This begins with an exploration of the possibilities for the post-biological notion of life (pp. 109-114) via an examination of the ontological premises for the artificial life modalities (p. 118) to the alternative approaches to the very notion of life, such as *autopoiesis* or *sympoiesis* as its conceptual extension (p. 141). The research culminates with an investigation of the adequacy of Barad's employment of quantum physics and her brand of 'agential realism,' Bennett's 'vital materialism' and Object-Oriented Ontology (pp. 158-165) for the 'scientific' framing of the posthuman condition. Yet the most creative aspect of this work, given in the form of an open project, is Ferrando's thought-provoking experiment figuring the posthuman multiverse as a set of "generative nets of material possibilities simultaneously happening and coexisting, corresponding to specific vibration of the strings, in a material understanding of the dissolution of the strict dualism one/many" (p. 178).

Taking the above, rather than as an 'ontological leap' of transhuman futurity, the Posthuman in this conception is rather perceived as a resolute upgrade on Heideggerian 'Mitsein' or, more specifically, as a celebration of plurality of life in its all-inclusive, post-bios and *zoē*-driven 'matter-realism' (p. 110). In this respect, as Ferrando emphasizes, it can already be adopted *hic et nunc*, by embracing the multifaceted onto-epistemological and ethical paradigm shift, namely the logic of "situated perspectivism," as opposed to the former one of "generalized universalism" (p.185).

In a nutshell, Ferrando presents her brand of posthumanist thought with an intense academic vigor, consistent systematicity, and a genuine commitment. Organized in an almost encyclopedic fashion, as a vital compendium of the most relevant strands of movements and orientations democratically situated under the term *Posthuman* as a hypernym, or a "post-centralized center" as she puts it (p. 39), this book delivers far more than just an overview of posthumanist discourse. Quite the contrary, the sui generis 'dynamic, mutant and shifting' post-methodological approach, employed as a signature of this discussion, makes this work a highly competent and ever-evolving intellectual device, didactic, critical, and at the same time no less programmatic in its reach.

### **Zum Posthumanen hier und jetzt: Posthumanismus als Philosophie unserer Zeit**

#### **German Abstract:**

Francesca Ferrandos neues Buch untersucht die theoretischen und praktischen Auswirkungen onto-epistemologischer und ethischer Aspekte des posthumanen Zustands unter Verwendung eines aktualisierten philosophischen Rahmens. Unter Erweiterung von Braidottis Verständnis des Posthumanismus (d.h. gegenseitig konvergiertem Post-Humanismus und Post-Anthropozentrismus) um das Element des Post-Dualismus, liegt Ferrandos Bestreben in ihrer Entschlossenheit, eine breite Palette von Markern oder konzeptuellen Knotenpunkten abzubilden, innerhalb derer ein solcher Paradigmenwechsel auftreten könnte: von der Diagnose und konsequenten Dekonstruktion von humanistisch-exklusivistischen Denkmustern, einiger neuerer Trends die aus dem transhumanistischen Lager hervorgegangen sind bis hin zur Andeutung des Multiversums posthumaner Möglichkeiten, die hier und jetzt bereits erlebt werden können.