Book Review

Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 296pp., \$103.50 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-3500-5950-4.

What makes *Philosophical Posthumanism* a generous and creative work is Francesca Ferrando's 'appreciation of the paradoxical structure of the posthuman condition itself', as put by Rosi Braidotti (p. xi). The book attempts to explain this paradoxical structure around three main questions, corresponding to the three parts: '(1) What is Philosophical Posthumanism? (2) Of which "human" is the posthuman a "post"? (3) Have humans always been posthuman?' (p. 1). Ferrando then lists 237 guiding questions (but the reader can find more in the text) and addresses them throughout the following 30 dense chapters. To position philosophical posthumanism within other 'isms' utilizing the concept of 'human', Ferrando deals with a range of themes from transhumanism and antihumanism to artificial intelligence, bioengineering, and ecology. Considering that religion and nature scholars have also been addressing similar questions for the last couple of decades, I believe this book may help to better integrate posthuman aspirations with the nexus of religion, nature, and culture.

At the very beginning of the book, Ferrando defines philosophical posthumanism as 'an onto-epistemological approach, as well as an ethical one, manifesting as a philosophy of mediation, which discharges any confrontational dualisms and hierarchical legacies; this is why it can be approached as a post-humanism, a post-anthropocentrism, and a post-dualism' (p. 22). The very emphasis on approaching philosophical posthumanism as a post-humanism, a post-anthropocentrism, and a post-dualism continues throughout the book. Underlying the importance of an 'awareness of the limits of previous humanistic, anthropocentric, and dualistic assumptions: from epistemology to ontology, from bioethics to an existential inquiry' (p. 55), the author deconstructs these assumptions. While the first part of the book primarily focuses on the dimensions of post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, the third part gives priority to post-anthropocentrism and post-dualism. The second part bridges these two through a questioning of the sociopolitical, economic, and symbolic construction of the 'human' and the 'scientific' framing of the *Homo sapiens*.

The first part traces the genealogy of posthumanism, paying attention to its connections with postmodernism, transhumanism, and antihumanism. The reader learns that the literature around the concepts of posthuman and posthumanism has been accumulating since Ihab Hassan's postmodern critique titled 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Critique?' that was published in 1977 (p. 25). By classifying Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) as an example of critical posthumanism, and Donna Haraway's 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1985) as a

cultural posthumanist work, Ferrando makes room for philosophical posthumanism. Following this, she distinguishes posthumanism from both transhumanism and antihumanism. Although arising around similar interests in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the main distinction between posthumanism and transhumanism is that while transhumanism accepts the Enlightenment notions without any critique, posthumanism shows itself as second-generation postmodernism as it intends the deconstruction of the human. This ideal brings posthumanism and antihumanism closer; however, the former aims at going beyond the dualism of the latter in approaching the human.

Furthermore, special attention may be paid to Ferrando's analysis of the transhumanist position concerning the religious roots of human exceptionalism. Engaging with David Noble's *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (1997), she draws a parallelism between Noble's description of techno-enchancement and transhumanist discourse on technology (p. 36). The discussion on human enhancement indicates that the idea of human enhancement as both disenchantment and re-enchancement through technological advancements has religious connotations.

In the second part, Ferrando engages with the concepts of humanizing (as a verb, following de Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Haraway), the anthropological machine (Agamben), technologies of the self (Foucault), and face-to-face epiphany (Levinas) to question the human as a historical and sociopolitical myth. She focuses on the 'historical humanization of specific categories of humans' and unveils the cases of exclusion through the examples of 'chattel slavery, genocides, freak shows, and witch trials' (p. 77). She also draws the reader's attention to the ancient history of the concept of human as well as the emergence of *Homo sapiens* as a scientific category. In the chapter 'Mammals or *Homo sapiens*', the author clearly shows how religion, science, and patriarchal ideology intertwine in Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (p. 93). While Linnaeus' classification undermined the Great Chain of Being, it was not exempt from the cultural norms of his period. For instance, Linnaeus' choice of coining Mammalia as one of the six animal divisions was in line with his understanding of the role of women in society and his advocacy of breastfeeding in the second half of the eighteenth century. This example reveals that *Homo sapiens* continued to reflect the dualist biases, such as *humanus-barbarus*, male-female, and abled-differently abled (p. 97).

After deconstructing the human in the first two parts, Ferrando attempts an onto-epistemological update of the human from a 'transversal and relational' (p. xvi) perspective. The chapters falling under the third part, therefore, tackle anthropocentric and dualist understandings of life and matter. In this part of the book, Ferrando's style becomes more authoritative and solution-oriented. This stylistic change can be seen in her integration of the discussion about artificial life to the posthuman perspective (pp. 115-19). In so doing, she challenges both anthropocentrism and technocentrism and makes the case for 'a post-dualistic, post-hierarchical praxis' for sustainable futures. Such an onto-epistemological attempt also has further implications for the study of religion, nature, and culture. First, posthuman perspectivism, which differs from dualistic relativism, is built upon three ethical-religious and philosophical sources: 'Amerindian perspectivism of Amazonian cosmologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998), religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism', and the Nietzschean shift (pp. 148-49). Moreover, analyzing

conservative and liberal bioethical positions from posthuman perspectivism may challenge the classical notions of right-left politics and bring religious right and radical left closer against the risks of biotechnology.

Although movements such as transhumanism, antihumanism, object-oriented ontology (OOO), new materialism, and metahumanism can be placed under the umbrella of posthuman, and philosophical posthumanism shares essential values with them, only philosophical posthumanism appears to enable the coexistence of post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, and post-dualism. In other words, Ferrando's philosophical approach to the idea of posthuman can be depicted at the intersection of these three approaches. Following the tradition of literary critique, Ferrando employs the philological and philosophical methods concentrically to explain the details of the coexistence of these three approaches.

To conclude, the most distinguishing feature of *Philosophical Posthumanism* is its author's vision towards a better future. Here, 'better' speaks to maintaining socio-economic and environmental justice. Therefore, *Philosophical Posthumanism* will guide social theorists as well as activists who aspire to change the world. This aspiration necessitates thinking, not out of the box, but beyond it. This book highlights the premises of philosophical posthumanism as a praxis to reach beyond the 'rational' disciplined thinking and acting.

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