

## Philosophy in Review



# Francesca Ferrando, "Philosophical Posthumanism."

Thomas Steinbuch

Volume 40, Number 1, February 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068148ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068148ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

### ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Steinbuch, T. (2020). Review of [Francesca Ferrando, "Philosophical Posthumanism."]. *Philosophy in Review*, 40(1), 7–9.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1068148ar>

Copyright Thomas Steinbuch, 2020



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

**Francesca Ferrando.** *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury 2019. 296 pp. \$115.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781350059504).

Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism* is an expanded and updated translation of her award winning *Il Postumanesimo filosofico e le sue alterità* published by ETS in 2016. With an introduction by Rosi Braidotti, we are right to anticipate something exciting in this work, and we are not disappointed.

Ferrando's search for the Posthuman launches from three analytical starting points: post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, and post-dualism. The book is organized around three questions which correspond to its three parts. In Part One, Ferrando investigates: What is philosophical posthumanism? She traces the genealogy of Philosophical Posthumanism, from Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' to Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Part Two, 'Of which human is the post human "post?"' then raises the question of how excluded subjectivities perceive themselves in relation to the notion of the human: the submissive Others in distortions projected by sexism, racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and ableism, and the defiantly joyful Others of the LGBT, queer, freak and carnivalesque Others among us. Finally, in Part Three, she asks: Have humans always been posthuman? Here she investigates the exclusivist meaning of life, the dualism of life and death, auto-poiesis and Nietzsche's perspectivism, to reveal that we have always been Posthuman.

After a thorough review of the notion of the human as presented in the West, the structuring of that notion and the onto-epistemological considerations that ground the idea that we are already Posthuman, her concluding thought experiment of a monistic-pluralistic multiverse fully deconstructs the centralizing and hegemonic assumptions involved in the idea of the human as it has been historically elaborated.

Drawing on Western feminist thought, Professor Ferrando underscores the parallels to be found between the deconstruction of patriarchy and the deconstruction of the human, justifying the narrative with the point that the subjectivities involved in both overlap. To follow out how Posthuman thought parallels feminist thought, Ferrando argues that in the West, the human, in keeping with Simone de Beauvoir's critique of the Otherness of woman, is not an essence rendered in social construction but a process. Drawing on Luce Irigaray, the parallel to the deconstruction of the patriarchal Self is that the human too has thus far been established in the ontological denial of the non-human. In tune with Judith Butler, the parallel is that the human has been constructed as a repeated performance which establishes and consolidates the subject, that is, 'the human: as gender is gendering, human is humanizing,' as Ferrando writes (72).

Although she cannot be criticized for not doing so, Ferrando does not address the Self/Other model that structures Asian patriarchy. Liable to the foregoing critiques as well, Asian patriarchy, Chinese patriarchy at any rate, is nevertheless different from Western patriarchy in ways that are perhaps not superficial. In the West, patriarchy works on the model of the Self-of-Power (always) and the Other of woman constructed as an ineffectual naïf who can be easily made to do as told ... or else! Here, intimidation is key. In China, patriarchy works from a misogynist dualism of the Self-of-Face (always) and the Other of Woman as liable to the shame of disobedience. The parallel to the deconstruction of the Asian conception of being a human in general should differ from the West.

As Ferrando notes, historically we have been developing humanizing through the Us/Them paradigm: we ontologize a dynamic of dominance/subordination in various fictions of Self/Other. However, there are additional possibilities she notes and exploring these brings her into critical engagement with other thinkers. 'I am, in my embodied human experience, and, in relation to others,'

she writes (85). We take a step forward in becoming Posthuman by embracing the idea of humanizing as a process of being in relation to others. The meaning of relation is still an issue and this point brings her into engagement with the work of Emmanuel Lévinas. Ferrando points out that Lévinas, sensitive not to assimilate and so reduce the Other to the Self, was still working within a dualistic paradigm: the absolutely other Other stands *face en face* over and against the Self to retain its integrity of non-assimilation to the Self to become an Other for whom I am responsible. As the author points out, as critical posthumanists, our commitment to post-dualisms implies that we should not stop at a binary relationship with the Other and attempt, rather, to construe Self and Other as standing in a mediated monistic-pluralism/pluralistic-monism in which the alterity of the Other, while retaining its integrity, is also overcome as absolute Other in its relatedness to the Self. The recognition of alterity as necessary to the manifestation of the Self means the deconstruction of Self/Other dualisms; Other(s) maintain their specific Otherness in and by their shared relationality to the Self. This deconstruction is a main outcome of Ferrando's account of Posthuman Philosophy as a philosophy of mediation and widens the scope of ethical responsibility and deontic signification to include our encounter with non-human Others in a post-anthropocentric, post-Anthropocene embrace. She develops her philosophy of mediation in an onto-epistemological vision of the multiverse in a section on that subject and in a following section 'Thought Experiment: The Posthuman Multiverse' in which she speaks in her own voice. In her pluralistic-monistic vision of the multiverse, praxis reaches its ultimate democratized signification. Ferrando's elaboration of a thought experiment of the concept of the multiverse where the self is not 'other' to its materialization and that both constitutes and is constituted by indefinitely many others in a monistic-pluralism/pluralistic-monism in an epiphanic vision of the Posthuman. It is a philosophically imaginative furthering of the Posthumanist onto-epistemological paradigm shift, where the human becomes 'a network of energies, alliances, matter, and perspectives, relating to any other forms of existence, allied through different material outcomes, and possibly, in different quantum dimensions' (181).

I appreciated Ferrando's thoughtful discussion of how Nietzsche does not quite fit the thinking of Philosophical Posthumanism. The author is surely right to see Nietzsche's perspectivism—that there are only interpretations—as being philosophical epistemology and not a satire of the possibility of knowledge (as it is in Swift, say) as some have suggested. But it may be argued that the perspectives that most engage Nietzsche occur in the dualism of the perspective of the moralist (which is Nietzsche's perspective) and the self-overcoming of the moralist into himself, the opposite, (also Nietzsche's perspective). Is Nietzsche thus an irremediable dualist? Perhaps not. The discussion of evolution as a technology of existence is sophisticated and perhaps could extend to Nietzsche's structure '*décadent und Anfang*' and unlike other exclusionary dualisms she is deconstructing. As a philosophical Posthumanist, Ferrando is right to problematize Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*; he is anthropocentric and clearly hierarchist. To make the case for Nietzsche as Posthumanist, Nietzsche's self-interrogatory 'Who am I' in *Ecce Homo*, is not a satire on the futility of self-knowledge, but a work of serious philosophical thinking. It cannot be detached in the text from the related questions that refer it to posthumanist thinking, even as Professor Ferrando articulates those questions: 'What am I?' and 'Where and when are we?' (99). Nietzsche uses just those terms for his self-identification in that work, '*what I am today, where I am today,*' suggesting that an epiphany of a Posthuman selfhood is coming to the fore as well. Where Nietzsche fits into Philosophical Posthumanism with most ease is as an early critic of the Anthropocene. To the philosopher who exhorted us to remain faithful to the Earth, the plan of some today to move us to another planet whilst leaving the earth to die would be recognized in his deconstructive analysis as being the ill will of *lebensfeindliche* humanity (to update for the further consideration of Posthumanists, not a newly

minted classification of wrongdoing but a socio-biological description of a mood disorder of compulsive vengefulness, formed during geophysical periods cataclysm and encoded and conserved to today by epigenetic mechanisms.)

This book has several unique organizational features. The book contains a Navigational Tool: A Glossary of Questions, in the front matter. As you go through each chapter, you will see these questions and the order in which they appear in the tool. The question/answer format makes it very easy for the reader to locate a specific interest. Additionally, following each of the three parts, the author locates where we are in the intellectual journey she takes us on with Interludes that summarize what has come before and introduces us to what is to come next. Ferrando is working from a very comprehensive base of sources—as could hardly be otherwise in an investigation of the subject of the Posthuman. The bibliography is complete, including both classical and contemporary sources.

In sum, Ferrando has written a philosophically original inquiry that addresses the formidable questions our time has given rise to that may rekindle hope in the power of critical thinking—that thinking gets somewhere—even in transcending itself, in all but the most despairing.

**Thomas Steinbuch**, Zhejiang University of Science and Technology