

Book Review

## *The Art of Being Posthuman: Who are we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Ferrando, F. (2023). *The Art of Being Posthuman: Who are we in the 21st century?* Polity Press. 240 pp. £55,00 €62,20 (Hardcover ISBN 9781509548958); £17,99 €20,40 (Paperback ISBN 9781509548965); £12,99 €17,99 (eBook ISBN 9781509548972).

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**Abstract:** Francesca Ferrando's book is a guide to self-discovery and self-inquiry, aimed at gaining more knowledge about the self and developing awareness of a new philosophical framework called Philosophical Posthumanism. This framework involves three non-hierarchical premises: 1) humans are not superior, 2) humans are part of the planet along with other species (non-human, vegetal, and technological), thus acknowledging that our planet is not centred around humans, and 3) the elimination of dichotomies (such as human-animal). The concept of the Posthuman signifies a shift that has been taking place, and to fully embrace it, traditional ideas need to be abandoned in favour of new posthumanist ones. This book is a contemporary contribution, and its chapters can be read in any order by anyone interested in expanding their knowledge. Those unfamiliar with the topic will benefit from reading it, as the author explains the main points in clear and accessible language, which is one of the key strengths of Ferrando's book.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism; Philosophical Posthumanism; human

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*The Art of Being Posthuman* by Francesca Ferrando is a profound and compelling exploration of Posthumanism, catering to readers who wish to embark on a thought-provoking journey into this philosophical realm. Authored by the posthumanist Francesca Ferrando, the book comprises a series of eight meticulously crafted meditations, offering readers the freedom to delve into the content in any order they choose. While the book's inspiration can be traced back to Descartes's six meditations (Descartes, 2022), it is essential to note that Ferrando's intention goes beyond a mere refutation of Descartes. Instead, the book seeks to challenge the traditional concept of a human-centred world, inviting readers to reevaluate their understanding of humanity and its place in the interconnected web of existence.

Many books on Posthumanism have been published. In 2019, Francesca Ferrando released a book on the subject titled *Philosophical Posthumanism* (Ferrando, 2019). *The Art of Being Posthuman* is a recent addition to the literature and a modern contribution to Philosophical Posthumanism. In the beginning of Ferrando's book, readers who are less familiar with the topic will gain an understanding of what Posthumanism is. Posthumanism is a philosophical framework that emerged in the 21st century, challenging the traditional idea of human superiority over other species. It suggests that humans are not superior and should not be seen as detached from the planet and other species. Philosophical Posthumanism embraces human diversity and dignity, and acknowledges the co-existence of multiple species, including non-human animals, plants, and technology. It investigates "the human condition not as an autonomous biological event to be addressed in isolation but as a cosmic co-emergence" (4).

If individuals choose to embrace Philosophical Posthumanism, it is recommended that they undertake the following three actions jointly:

- 1) Recognise the diverse nature of humanity and acknowledge the existence of multiple species, including non-human, vegetal, and technological entities.
- 2) Discard the notion of a human-centred ecosphere and instead adopt a more inclusive perspective that considers the interconnection of all species.
- 3) Challenge dichotomous thinking and recognize that humans are an integral part of this planet, and all species deserve equal dignity and respect.

Each meditation is intended to serve not only as an opportunity for self-reflection and self-inquiry but also as a comprehensive guide on the approach towards Posthumanism. For the author, Posthumanism symbolises a significant transformation that is underway, suggesting a departure from traditional human-centred perspectives towards a more inclusive understanding of humanity's relationship with technology, ecology, and other forms of life. This perspective underlines the importance of evolving our thinking and practices in alignment with these emerging paradigms.

Ferrando underlines that readers have the flexibility to approach the meditations in any order they prefer. Within each meditation, there are specific tags addressing essential concepts from the posthuman vocabulary. For instance, the concept of *Philosophical Greenwashing* (Fourth Meditation) indicates the idea of only discussing a topic relative to the biosphere without taking practical action or making concrete changes. These concepts are meticulously analysed and clearly expounded, presenting yet another notable strength of Ferrando's book. I highly recommend that readers take the time to immerse themselves in this book. This advice particularly applies to those who are new to the concept of Posthumanism. For these individuals, it is crucial to invest ample time in comprehending the depth and breadth of Posthumanism and to consider whether they adhere to its principles. This book can be viewed as an invaluable tool for contemplation on the essence of Posthumanism and the reasons why this paradigm shift holds such significance. The awareness of Posthumanism is likened to embarking on a solo journey that requires thoughtful self-reflection and introspection from everyone, without forgetting that we are (p)art of this planet.

All meditations address existential questions such as, What am I? Who are you? Where and when are we? (First Meditation) They cover different topics, such as overcoming the neat separation between *us* and *them* and understanding ourselves as part of the evolutionary history (Second Meditation) that reflects the human essence manifesting in societies (Third Meditation). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that as (p)art of this planet, we need to take concrete action rather than just engaging in intellectual discussion (Fourth Meditation). We need to acknowledge the current change (Fifth Meditation) and the positive impact of technology on our lives. However, we should also consider the potential risks associated with the remarkable power of technology, i.e., the possibility of the artificial intelligence takeover. Consequently, other questions arise: is there any form of awareness in technological entities? (Sixth Meditation) Social and ontological awareness are crucial types of awareness which lead us through our journey of self-discovery. On the one hand, social awareness involves understanding where we are at in order to comprehend our identity (Seventh Meditation). On the other hand, ontological awareness addresses the questions: Why are we here? What is consciousness and awareness? (Eighth Meditation) All these existential questions serve as steps to become 'posthuman agents of change' (7).

While I appreciated the concept of organising the book into eight separate meditations, I believe it would have enhanced the reading experience to include a comprehensive glossary at the end of the book. This would empower readers to swiftly access concise definitions for any unfamiliar words or expressions encountered throughout the text, belonging to the Posthumanism lexicon. Furthermore, although I found the grouped footnotes for each meditation helpful, personally, I prefer footnotes to be presented immediately. I find this approach to be more convenient and immediate for the reader. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the decision to aggregate all footnotes at the end of the book may have been made to ensure a seamless and undistracted reading experience for the audience.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe that readers of all backgrounds, regardless of their familiarity with Posthumanism, will find valuable insights in this book. It not only offers a comprehensive understanding of this emerging philosophical framework, but also encourages readers to embark on a transformative intellectual journey. The author's concluding mantra, "We Are (P)Art, and Art, Beyond the Human: We Are" (193), captures the essence of the book's core message, inviting readers to contemplate the profound significance of this new perspective.

## References

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