

BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE POSTHUMAN TURN IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Abstract

Most hitherto theories and ideologies of social sciences, from the so-called classical ones to the critical ones are inherently anthropocentric and humanistic in nature. Even if most theories seem to be positioned antithetical to one another, they share similar anthropocentric assumptions. Major divergence in the evolution of social sciences comes in the form of the so-called posthuman turn, which refers to the various ways in which new modes of thoughts emerge or are invented by adopting approaches that are significantly different from the conventional humanist and anthropocentric ones, especially from a philosophical perspective. The ideational changes are catalyzed by corresponding changes in history, in the form of revolutionary developments in Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanist technologies, and so on. This paper aims to give a brief and generalist introduction of posthumanism. It begins by defining posthumanism, before trying to locate some of its roots in feminist studies and in science and technology studies. It then attempts to explain posthumanism through the three categories Francesca Ferrando divides Posthumanism into- Post-Humanism (notice the hyphen), Post-anthropocentrism, and Post-dualism, before concluding with a brief commentary.

Keywords

Anthropocentrism, Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Dualism, Feminism, Ecologism, Anthropocene, Speciesism

Introduction - Post Humanism(s)

The Oxford Dictionary defines Posthumanism as “the idea that humanity can be transformed, transcended, or eliminated either by technological advances or the evolutionary process; an artistic, scientific, or philosophical practice which reflects this belief” (Press, 2018). It is an umbrella term used to denote a range of related and even starkly different ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, approaches, scientific and philosophical frameworks, and so on, which is why there is no one conception of posthumanism but many posthumanisms. In political philosophy, in a relatively narrower sense, it can be seen as a meta-ideology or a meta-theory that stands for the theoretical de-centering of the human subject from philosophical and political assumptions and considerations, aiming towards a more holistic and equitable conception of things.

The term posthumanism was used for one of the first times in Ihab Hassan’s *Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?*, in which, he makes an attempt to understand or lay the case for cultural posthumanism (Hassan, 1977). He claims, “We need first to understand that the human form [...] may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism” (Franssen, 2018). The term is

being used across disciplines to denote different ideas. The range of subjects within posthumanism range from attempting to change worldviews to even change or analyse changes in the way the cultural, as well as the natural world, works.

In any case, it denotes a departure from the mostly modern conception of the human subject, with the structures of legitimation that are created by or support that human, calling for radical redefinitions of the various, mostly foundational concepts. Similarly, the posthuman may be a human with a post-anthropocentric or post-humanistic consciousness. It may also be a cyborg (which are hybrids of organisms and machines), or a pure artificial machine with intelligence, and so on, including real and virtual entities that are unimaginable today.

The impetus and urgency of the need for such redefinition and for novel researches in the emerging fields emanate from the novel developments, inventions, and discoveries in the various fields of science and technology, like in information technology, biotechnology, and so on, along with parallel developments in the disciplines of social sciences, that have called for ideational innovations to deal with the challenges or unwanted by-products of anthropocentrism, in the form of climate change, unprecedented destruction of natural earth by the impacts caused by a single species, different forms of social segregation among groups of humans, speciesism-based exploitation, and so on.

Pramod Nayar identifies posthumanism broadly under two categories, namely ontological posthumanism and critical posthumanism (Nayar, 2014, pp. 16-22). The former is more empirically identifiable, bearing resemblances with transhumanism and actual changes made to the biological bodies (or going beyond those) of human species, vis-a-vis the more humanly intangible conception of a normative, imaginative, or essentialist evolution or revolution! The idea of the human, here, in the latter sense, is mainly associated with the cultural realm, with an essentialist understanding, invites this work to focus on the critical or normative version of posthumanism, although not divorcing completely from the ontological aspects.

Francesca Ferrando, too, treats posthumanism as a mega-umbrella, open-ended, constantly evolving, and expanding term, insisting on referring it to as posthumanisms (rather than posthumanism) (Ferrando, 2017). She associates it with a range of diverse movements, sub-paradigms, sister-disciplines, and philosophical theories, including philosophical, cultural, and critical posthumanism; transhumanism (including the different sub-schools of extropianism, liberal and democratic transhumanism, and so on); the feminist approach of new materialisms; the heterogeneous landscape of antihumanism, metahumanism, metahumanities, and posthumanities (Ferrando, 2013).

Francesca Ferrando's article titled *Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms - Differences and Relations* and Jay David Bolter's *Posthumanism* are the two major sources utilized here to provide structure in expressing the key arguments of posthumanism in the pages that follow in this chapter, without which it might possibly become a highly abstract exercise (Ferrando, 2013; Bolter, 2016).

Impact of Scientific and Technological Studies in the evolution of Posthumanism

In addition to the ontological posthuman and transhuman developments heralded by application of science and technology (like the creation of different forms of transhumans, virtual neural databases and networks, post-human androids with pure artificial intelligence devoid of humanist bias, and so on), various philosophers having expertise in scientific and technological studies have provided revolutionary ideas, which could be of great interest to critical and philosophical posthumanists and their likes.

Science and Technology Studies (STS) is recently emergent discipline that aims, in its broadest sense, to understand the linkages and trade-offs between the developments in scientific and technological disciplines and the anthropological, social, and cultural systems, undertaking a critical, subjective, interpretive and a post-positivistic approach to understanding some of the most classical positivistic and objective phenomena. It is a discipline similar to, but more appropriate for posthumanism than the discipline of Anthropology of Science and Technology, which (the latter) undertakes a predominantly anthropological study of the same, therefore, is more appropriate for application in transhumanism (University, 2018).

STS attempts a merger or synthesis between two extensive approaches- the first involving “research on the nature and practices of science and technology (S&T)”, and the second involving the study of “the impacts and control of science and technology, with particular focus on the risks, benefits and opportunities that S&T may pose to peace, security, community, democracy, environmental sustainability, and human values” (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2018). It, thus, helped in the use of the predominantly social scientists’ tools of normative evaluation and deconstruction on scientific and technological developments.

It, thus, lays the foundation for social scientists to engage in Speculative Posthumanism (which allow for imagining post-human ‘things’, as an ontological exercise), who would otherwise have stayed content with Posthumanism’s Critical and Philosophical *avatars* (which are predominantly discursive exercises) (Danaher, 2015).

Bruno Latour is one of the foremost figures in anthropology of science, who creates the momentum that possibly posthumanism was looking for, arguing that- *We Have Never Been Modern* with a book carrying the same name, in which, he mystifies the modernists' tendency to take for granted modernism and the associated ideas of rationalism, objectivism, positivism, the dualistic superiority of science over faith, of subject over object, of objectivity over subjectivity, of culture over nature, of the mind over the brain (and the brain over body), and modernism over pre-modernism, while arguing that- history is, in fact, abound in mixed-up hybridities that make any such dualistic possibility probable (Latour, 1993; Latour, 2018). While holding such an imperfect conception of reality (but portrayed in a perfect solution-oriented way), responsible for many large scale problems of the modern day, while emphasizing the “interrelationships between three large-scale domains: science and technology, politics and government, language and semiotic studies” while examining “the premodernists, postmodernists, antimodernists, and so-called modernists”, asserting that “we ... now need to pursue a form of modernism (which he describes) purged of its counterproductive features” (Choice, 2018).

In an edited book, he calls to *Reset Modernity!*, as he argues – “Modernity has had so many meanings and combines so many contradictory sets of attitudes and values that it has become impossible to use it to define the future. It crashes like an overloaded computer. Hence the idea is that modernity might need a sort of reset. Not a clean break, not a ‘tabula rasa,’ not another iconoclastic gesture, but rather a restart of the complicated programs that have accumulated in what is often called the ‘modernist project’” (Latour, 2016).

Latour is also one of the most original contributors to the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), through which he argued that "the production of scientific knowledge could be understood only by tracing networks of relationships between entities as disparate as lab animals, existing scientific texts, human researchers, experimental subjects, established technologies, and social movements, among others", thus identifying a complex, networked and heterogeneous codependence between humans and non human entities (Tesch, 2013).

Influences in Feminism

Posthumanism also takes a lot of insights from feminist studies, including the de-centering of man as the political subject, the domination of the cultural notion of gender over the biological sex, which could be found in the works of Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and so on (Bolter, 2016).

Donna Haraway, a socialist-feminist, in *A Cyborg Manifesto* attempts to delegitimize rigid separations of the human-animal-nature-technology and calls the feminists to relinquish the conventional methods of identity- (sexual- and gender-) based politics and to move towards a form of politics that believes in greater assimilation of these perceived differences (Haraway, 2016). Haraway, philosophically, identifies herself as a cyborg (or a cybernetic-organism), even though she has not undergone any bodily- or cognitive- technological enhancement, because she believes that “the realities of modern life happen to include a relationship between people and technology so intimate that it's no longer possible to tell where we end and machines begin” (Kunzru, 1997).

Cyberfeminism, analyses, critiques, and even extols the role of technological advancements, especially of the internet and the cyber-space in emancipating or creating newer forms of virtual domination for women (Consalvo, 2012).

Francesca Ferrando understands posthumanism under three broad categories- as Post-Humanism (notice the hyphen), Post-anthropocentrism, and Post-dualism (Ferrando, 2017; Ferrando, 2016).

Posthumanism as Post-Humanism

"All Men Are Equal, but Some Are More So" (Michael, 1974).

-Sami Michael

"When we are talking on the human plane questions of justice only arise when there is equal power to compel: in terms of practicality the dominant exact what they can and the weak concede what they must" (Thucydides, 2009, p. 302).

-Thucydides (in *The Peloponnesian War*)

Post-humanism carries forward the Derridean legacy of deconstruction, through which it attempts to deconstruct the human subject or the *Anthropos* in humanism and anthropocentrism respectively. It aims to understand the idea of humanism by uncovering its deep-rooted biases, hierarchical dualities, and relationships with power. It contends that the human is not an objective or factual reality waiting to be discovered, but rather, an inter-subjective and dynamic social creation, existing in the minds of the thinking subjects, especially the powerful ones.

Therefore, the idea of 'human' here is not a purely scientific or empirical idea of the body with the brain of the last surviving species among various species of humans (including 'hominins' like the Neanderthals, the Denisovans, the 'hobbits' and so on)- the homo sapiens (Hogenboom, 2015).

Rather, it is a normative idea, superimposed in the empirical-biological human subject. As Rosi Braidotti puts it- "The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian 'community of reasonable beings', or, in more sociological terms, the subject as a citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 1). Here, the species- Homo sapiens may be distinguished from the legal, cultural, or ethical idea of personhood (associated with citizenship-which means different things in different jurisdictions), the latter being the subject of concern here. To make things more clear, personhood or humanness, legally (modern, Western connotation), refers to an actor having certain moral status or claims to certain rights accorded (mostly) to privileged human citizens, in the prevailing social understanding of the term.

Pramod Nayar defines the cultural and philosophical concept of human with the associated idea of humanism in the posthuman and posthumanism respectively as-

The human is traditionally taken to be a subject (one who is conscious of his/her self) marked by rational thinking/intelligence, who is able to plot his/her own course of action depending on his/her needs, desires and wishes, and, as a result of his/her actions, produces history. The human has traditionally been treated as male and universal. It is always treated in the singular (the human) and as a set of features or conditions: rationality, authority, autonomy, and agency.

Humanism is the study of this individual subject and the composite features we now recognize as the human. It treats the human subject as the centre of the world, which is influenced by the human's thoughts and actions. The freedom of the individual to pursue his choice is treated as central to the human subject. The human's awareness of his self – to recognize himself for what he is – or self-consciousness is also treated as a sign of being human.

More importantly, concepts of human dignity, Human Rights and debates over the human 'condition' are premised upon this idea of the universal human. It treats the common human condition. Morality, ethics, responsibility in the modern era (roughly post-1600) all emerge from this view of the autonomous, self-conscious, coherent and self-determining human. The essence of the human lies in the rational mind, or soul – which is entirely distinct from the body. Change and improvement, therefore, are deemed to be possible through

this power of the rational mind. Rationality is also this 'essence' of the human – his ability to think about himself, be sure of himself – that distinguishes him (supposedly) from all other forms of life, and aliens.

(Nayar, 2014, pp. 15-16)

The academic concept of humanity has evolved over the ages as is argued by thinkers like Boria Sax, who notes-

Meanings of the word 'human' may have proliferated over the centuries, particularly since the Renaissance... In the initial stage of this process 'humanity' is not so much what we now call a 'species' as a sort of experience, primarily one of transience and vulnerability. Human beings are seen not as existing in relation to 'animals' but, if anything, to deities. In the second stage, starting in late antiquity, animal rather than deities emerge as the major template against which human beings are defined. In the third stage, starting around the Renaissance, the understanding of 'human' is expanded to embrace new technologies and cultural products. Humanity, in consequence, becomes less an organism than a sphere of existence, which is opposed not so much to animals as to 'nature'.

(Sax, 2011, p. 22)

Therefore, humanity, on critical deconstruction, appears to be a dynamic and fluid meta-idea, one that is entrenched in relations of powers, which are responsible for its divisions across various dualistic identities like gender, race, caste, class, ability, religions, nationalities, and so on. It is mostly defined in opposition to animals and in similarities with an imagined god or a technologically advanced being.

Summing up, therefore, the idea of the *Anthropos* (in anthropocentrism), the human (in human rights), the person (in law) and so on is not the idea of an all-inclusive category of biological *Homo sapiens* but has further exclusions and inclusions. The exclusion of humans, mostly are spatially- and temporally- context-specific and identity-based categorizations of sameness and fraternity within and of differences and conflicts without (based on mostly imagined metrics). The inclusion, over and above human categories may involve imaginary deities, revered rivers, robots, and so on, all of which are privileged by virtue of their position in the contemporary social and cultural code of ethics.

Post-humanism, after deconstructing the human and uncovering its fascinating nuances, also attempts to overcome the hierarchical or anarchical dualities contained within the idea of a human. Therefore, in a situation where the human finds itself on a historical, evolutionary, or discursive continuum of sorts, and cannot very scientifically and conclusively be separated or dissociated from either its evolutionary roots or its teleological ends, rather than just to a minor degree of relativism, any attempt to justify dichotomies within humanity itself would be relatively greater challenges, or *prima facie*- unscientific and illogical.

As an ideology, therefore, it may advocate the ideas of cosmopolitanism, biocentrism, ecologism, new-materialism, and so on. It is willing to broaden the often narrow conceptions of citizenship or personhood by including hitherto underprivileged humans, other animals, artificial beings, and so on. It may promote revising the ideas concerning justice, rescuing it from its mostly ethnocentric and anthropocentric limitations. Therefore, it may be willing to recognize an unprecedented level of formal equality among erstwhile subjects and objects, thus endorsing a recasting of division of rights and duties.

Posthumanism as Post-anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is co-initial with humanism (and especially the modern conception of it). Both share overwhelming overlapping. Whereas the critical deconstruction of humanism is generally called critical humanism, that of anthropocentrism is called critical posthumanism, the latter especially being the subject of concern here, although different thinkers may adhere to other nuanced positions. Anthropocentrism, like

humanism, is a meta-ideology centered in egoism, exclusivism, instrumentalism, and so on. It considers humanity (especially its privileged varieties) as metaphorically being the centre of the universe and the ethical endpoint in material and biological evolution. Humans, therefore, are seen as the conscious and thinking subjects most worthy of legal, ethical, and moral considerations. It considers non-humans (including many groups of the human species) as being subordinate to or objects of exploitation for improving the subjective experience of the superior humans.

The attitude of human superiority or that of moral and ethical concerns, vis-à-vis other animal species is characteristic of the ideology of speciesism, that involves discrimination and exploitation on the basis of difference in species. Peter Singer, one of the foremost critiques of speciesism, explains speciesism crudely as “an attitude of bias against a being because of the species to which it belongs. Typically, humans show speciesism when they give less weight to the interests of nonhuman animals than they give to the similar interests of human beings” (Singer, 2015). In *Animal Liberation*, Singer advocates a post-anthropocentric and post-speciesist approach in dealing with sentient non-human beings (Singer, 2002).

Interestingly, anthropocentrism includes not only speciesism against species of other genera (or groups of similar species) but also one's own. Ancient humans, most probably, used to practice it against members other human species, as once upon a time there were multiple human species that shared common space on Earth, like *Homo erectus*, Neanderthals, *Homo habilis*, Denisovans, and so on were. Keeping in mind that humans evolved from other species through natural selection, with the fittest surviving (and not appeared somewhere or are a product of intelligent and artificial design), as evolutionary biologists like Charles Darwin claim, it is also important to note that that such evolution from one human form (or even species) to another was not necessarily linear (as is commonly held and interpreted when we see the illustration of a modern *Homo sapiens* evolving from an earlier ape-like ancestor), rather there occurred simultaneous evolution of different human forms (or species), that probably coexisted, even interbred, and engaged in conflicts (Darwin, 1958; Gould, 2002; Jenner, 2017). *Homo neanderthalensis* and *Homo erectus* come closest to modern humans in the evolutionary timetable, and there is also genetic evidence that they, along with *Homo habilis* and Denisovans sometimes interbred among them and with sapiens, as DNA comparisons indicate, which explains why DNA profiles of some modern humans faintly resembles that of some other species (Szalay, 2017; Hammer, Woerner, Mendez, Watkins, & Wall, 2011; Callaway, 2016). Although the exact set of reasons for the extinction of every other species of humans than *Homo sapiens* is still a matter of speculation, there are reasons to speculate that there was a sapiens hand, in addition to natural and other causes. All being hunter-gatherers, it is imaginable that they indulged in violent conflicts. And given the fact that humans have had the tendency to carry a sense of cultural superiority, it is also conceivable that there were considerable suspicion and contempt among the human species, which also a form of speciesism. There have been various studies that have claimed that sapiens had a major role, rather than exogenous factors, in the wiping out of the human cousins like the neanderthals, given the cultural superiority among sapiens (Stockton, 2014; Gilpin, Feldman, & Aoki, 2015). Yuval Noah Harari considers the role of superior cognitive, socializing, and technological abilities of the sapiens in making them better at uniting and mobilizing forces towards common imagined goals (Harari, 2014). Anyway, humans, in many parts, continue to discriminate and have also discriminated with other humans, ‘othering’ them by means of some real or perceived identities or differences, considering the others as sub-humans or non-humans. Speciesism, within anthropocentrism, therefore, is not only based on perceptible markers of differences but also very imaginary and purely cultural ones.

Anthropocentrism has arguably reached its peak in the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is the colloquially held proposed naming of the present-day geological epoch after the name of the species that has influenced it the most- the humans. Human activities have caused unprecedented changes to the various sub-spheres of the Earth's biosphere, from global warming to the sixth mass extinction of faunal species to wide-ranging pollution to massive overpopulation among humans to unprecedented control over and exploitation of the biomass on Earth (Myers, 2016). Experts attribute the unprecedented mega-events, the last notable one being the Industrial Revolution that had led to the massive advancements in science and technologies at the disposal of humans (with hardly evolved genetic characteristic), as being one of the key catalysts in the causing

of the Anthropocene (Rafferty, 2019). Thus geologists and other scientists are taking this unprecedented step of naming an epoch after one species—the sapiens.

Much of the prevailing modern discourses, institutions, ideas, ideologies, and norms are anthropocentric in nature. The human order and its relations with the 'others' is largely driven by anthropocentrism, at an epoch which is characterized by the preponderance of humans. Social sciences consequently are overwhelmingly anthropocentric in nature. For instance, in politics, the positions called the left and the right, categories in which most humans find themselves, are fundamentally anthropocentric ways of scrambling for power and resources for different sections of humanity. Environmentalism and animal welfare, again, are driven towards human-centric ends, and care for the 'others' only insofar as the latter serves the needs, interests, and aspirations of the human subject. Ecologism, in contrast, is a pre- or post- anthropocentric position that is ideally species-neutral but never really attains much relevance, rather than on textbooks.

Post-anthropocentrism seeks to go beyond the human-centeredness, human self-congratulatory exclusivism, imagined anthropocentric and humanist dualisms, and instrumentalism and exploitation of other non-humans (especially the sentient ones), and so on.

Rosi Braidotti, in *The Posthuman*, advocates a form of materialist monism, recognizing the universe, with all its biotic, abiotic, ideational, and discursive components as of being parts of the whole, with life and consciousness being irremovable parts of the whole, rather than of those parts which have achieved some form of evolutionary material advancement. She adopts the idea from the Spinozist monism that is characteristic of 'vitalist materialism' and 'radical immanence', which is in contrast to the various forms of dualisms, especially the Cartesian mind-body dualism that forms a key influencing factor behind modern humanism and anthropocentrism (Braidotti, 2013, p. 56). For more on monism and dualism, please refer to the next section.

Such a holistic understanding of matter, including its living manifestations, takes us towards considerations of cosmopolitanism, biocentrism, ecologism, and so on, to consider all objects, especially the living, equitably, with an ethic of respect and care. Braidotti, expressing anguish against the commodified and objectified exploitation of other underprivileged life forms at the hands of the anthropocentric techno-capitalism and advocates a biocentric turn ushering the posthuman one by making the *Zoe* the unit of analysis, which she explains in the following way—

'Life', far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as a process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for Anthropos, that is to say, bios, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as zoe. Zoe as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself.

(Braidotti, 2013, p. 60)

Therefore, adopting a conception of formal bio-centric or life-centric equality, with substantive "Zoe-centred egalitarianism" could be one of the viable and necessary stages in post-anthropocentric theoretical evolution. The overwhelming majority of living organisms and especially the sentient beings are languishing under excruciating circumstances, especially by virtue of living in an anthropocentric world. They are either mercilessly raised and killed for food under perpetually dire conditions, or processed into various commodities, or merely suffer from the systemic and even unintended anthropocentric practices, like by experiencing global warming, by ingesting pollutants like plastic, by dying of road accidents, and so on. Hence, if sentience is considered the level or moment of analysis, the anthropocentric world badly affects the overwhelming mass of life for granting ephemeral benefits to a tiny section of humanity.

Another way of speaking for the subaltern in modern humanism and anthropocentrism comes in the way of the idea of Object Oriented Ontologies or OOO, a term popularized by Graham Harman. Harman in *Object-Oriented Ontology - A New Theory of Everything*, contends that objects – “whether real, fictional, natural, artificial, human or non- Human – are mutually autonomous and enter into relation only in special cases that need to be explained rather than assumed” (Harman, 2017, p. 12). It considers all forms of objects, as enunciated above, as being

considered as independent and autonomous, rather than relegating those as objects of another's subjective experience (in anthropocentrism- the human's). The intervention, agency, or mediation of the human mind and its associated subjectivity, that tends to fit the objects within constructed sets of imaginary structures must be avoided and minimized, granting objects a sense of independence, approaching everything with a sense of equality or equity.

Posthumanism as Post-dualism

Dualism (often portrayed against and between monism and pluralism) is an understanding applied by various schools of thought that involves the characterization that- in some particular spheres, there exist contrasting duality (often in hierarchical ordering) of the existence of their fundamental constituents (Robinson, 2016). For instance- the dualist conceptions of good versus evil, right versus wrong, mind versus body (with brain), reason versus faith, existence versus essence, subject versus object, real versus virtual, nature versus culture, anthropocentric versus ecocentric, and so on, promote the privileging of one of these conceptions over the other considering them antithetical to each other.

Anthropocentrism is based on many such dualisms, by championing which it has been able to widen the asymmetries of power of privilege. Some of those dualisms include the perceived superiority of mind over body, of reason over emotion, of culture over nature, of absolutism over relativism, of humans over non-human, of technological over traditional, and of objectivity over subjectivity (Warren, 2015). Francesca Ferrando argues how the *Anthropos* has been instrumental in inventing, perpetuating, and legitimizing many such dualisms, for instance- Greeks portrayed themselves as real humans vis. a vis. the 'Barbarians' and legitimized the exploitation of the latter; the race-supremacists did a similar thing with the 'coloured' people (the subject matter of racism); the West (or North) has claimed a similar superiority over the East (or South) in modern times, even in intellectual circles of social sciences and in political norms-creation; humans have exploited the nature (subject matter of ecologism), including other species (promoting speciesism), and so on (Ferrando, 2017).

Posthumanism attempts to bridge the gap between such dualisms or to overcome those altogether. It promotes interrelations, relationality, coexistence, and even radical changes in perspectives, for instance- it can promote syntheses of dualisms in the form of say- cosmopolitanism (overcoming the local/domestic/national – international/global dichotomy), cyborg (overcoming the nature-culture, real – virtual, and human-machine dualisms) and so on (Ferrando, 2017). It overcomes the Cartesian dualism, and is willing to offer greater accommodation to the exploited 'objects' (by 'subjects'), promoting tolerance and relativism by not prioritizing one entity/value of the other (Bolter, 2016).

Advaita (non-dual or literally- non-second) is a philosophy having originated in ancient India that promoted an idealist monism, or, a form of non-dual or non-plural conception of everything claiming that it is only due to interpretive inaccuracy (*mithya*) and lack of knowledge (*avidya*) that one experiences dualities or pluralities, which, in reality, are similar parts of the whole- *Brahman*, claiming "*brahma satyam jagan mithya; jīvo brahmaiva na aparah*" (*Brahman* is the only truth, whereas the appearances of plurality in the world are but errors; the individual personality cannot be differentiated or removed from *Brahman*) (Menon, 2018).

The metaphysics contained in the Advaita Vedanta argues that "Brahman—the ultimate, transcendent and immanent God of the latter Vedas—appears as the world because of its creative energy (*māyā*). The world has no separate existence apart from *Brahman*. The experiencing self (*jīva*) and the transcendental self of the Universe (*ātman*) are in reality identical (both are *Brahman*), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such" (Menon, 2018).

One important lesson posthumanism can take from Advaitism is the way it mixes a non-naturalistic ontology (claiming that everything is illusory and supernatural) with naturalistic epistemology (that perceptive cognition of everything around us is to be respected, as part of that supernatural) (Chatterjee, 2017). It, therefore, overcomes most of the dichotomies that are characteristic of modern thinking.

Even the idea behind *Dvaita* (dualist) school of Upanishadic philosophy is much closer to Advaitism (which can serve as an inspiration for transformation towards posthumanism) rather than to Cartesian Dualism (which serves as an inspiration for anthropocentrism). As Madhvacarya argues, “there are two orders of reality: 1. *svatantra*, independent reality, which consists of *brahman* alone and 2. *paratantra*, dependent reality, which consists of *jivas* (souls) and *jada* (lifeless objects). Although dependent reality would not exist apart from *brahman's* will, this very dependence creates a fundamental distinction between *brahman* and all else” (Stoker, 2018). It, thus, recognizes the ecological, material, and essential unity of all- biotic, abiotic, and the supernatural components.

Its ideas may find resonance with the emerging thinking of New Materialism that is a postmodern analysis of superstructures constructed on material bases, advocating a non-dualistic analysis of everything related to matter (including non-material objects, processes, norms, etc.) (Sencindiver, 2017).

New Materialists, as advocates of a post-dual, post-human politics of holistic entanglement and of material situatedness of the material subjects and objects seek “a repositioning of the human among nonhuman actants, they question the stability of an individuated, liberal subject, and they advocate a critical materialist attention to the global, distributed influences of late capitalism and climate change” (Sanzo, 2018). Influenced by the likes of Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Manuel DeLanda, and Vicki Kirby, its exponents include the likes of Stacey Alaimo, Susan J. Hekman, Tony Bennett, Patrick Joyce, Samantha Frost, Diana Coole, Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin, Richard Grusin, and many more (Sencindiver, 2017).

Moreover, post-dualism (including the philosophy of advaitism) can also provide insights to ontological posthumanism, which includes, among many possibilities, the creation of, transfer of consciousness to, and living in a- virtual world (that was not created by traditional natural selection).

Technologies are being created by which it will be possible to create completely virtual worlds, existing only in computational networks and databases, like the way it is imagined in the Hollywood movie *The Matrix* in which a character asks – "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you seemed so sure it was real? But if we are unable to wake up from that dream, how would you tell the difference between the dream world & the real world?" or in *Inception* “Dreams feel real while we're in them. It's only when we wake up that we realize something was actually strange”, or in the television series *Westworld* (Stewart & Wachowski, 1999; Nolan, 2010).

The researcher would not comment on the argument whether the modern human subject and its surrounding ontologies are real or whether we are perpetually in a state of dream or illusion, as today there is perhaps no way one can be sure of that possibility. But, as said, with technological developments such a possibility can be realized, and the coming virtual can be made the new real to create a condition of, say, a virtual but ideal world where the citizens would have no idea of their non-reality. In such a hypothetical situation, real and virtual would lose their inherent difference and become a matter of contextual relativity.

By reading books (and getting an experience of a person's physical lifetime), watching fictional movies (and weeping over emotional scenes), believing in fairytales and superheroes (just as if they really existed and saved lives), emotionally reacting over a WhatsApp emoji or emoticon (as if it was a ‘real’ expression), having a chat with Amazon's Alexa or Microsoft's Cortana (as if those were ‘real’ domestic help), gaining sensual pleasure by watching pornography (and not performing the task to perform which such a pleasure was invented by nature- for procreation), playing Player Unknown's Battlegrounds, better known with the acronym PUBG, (and getting the feeling of being a soldier on a front), safeguarding imaginary religions and nations (while bombarding ‘real’ animal bodies and biodiversity), the advancements in virtual reality, augmented reality, and so on, are examples of how, even in the anthropocentric era, humans have closed the gap between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’, often confusing one for the other.

The extent to which the virtual world has been embedded in our physical reality is unprecedented, which is expected to touch greater depths in an ontologically posthuman world. And, even before and while closing such a gap between real and virtual, posthumanism attempts to overcome the other limiting dualities too- that are arguably responsible for the asymmetries in anthropocentrism.

Conclusion

Jay David Bolter summarizes the development and evolution of the modern conception of human and humanism as being inherently anthropocentric and dualistic in the following way-

Humanism was by definition anthropocentric; humanism as a historical phenomenon drew on a renewed and reinterpreted appreciation for the rhetoric and civilization of Greece and Rome, in placing man (rather than God) at the center of its literary and philosophical project. Modern science beginning in the Renaissance sought to achieve an understanding of the natural world that depended on human powers of observation and reason to uncover universal laws. As a Cartesian thinking subject, man could examine the world and explain its workings with scientific detachment—as Galileo famously put it, in the language of mathematics. This view of man as an autonomous agent, separate from though still engaged with nature, flourished in the Enlightenment. Scholars of posthumanism regard Darwinian biology, Marxist economists, and Freudian psychology as preliminary indications of the breakup of this unified Enlightened subject. Nevertheless, although the separation and elevation of man from and over the natural world were called into question by these 19th-century developments in biology, psychology, and economics, positivist science sought to maintain the subject-object dichotomy even in the 20th century.

(Bolter, 2016)

Posthumanism, therefore, attempts a break from the egoist, anthropocentric, speciesist, and the dualistic attributes contained in humanism and especially the modern variety of it. Posthumanism contends that humanity itself is embedded in complex assemblages of ontological and discursive phenomena, situated somewhere between evolutionary biological animal, artificial cyborg, an imaginary god, between nature and culture, between the living, the non-living, the ephemeral, and the eternal, between matter, energy, ideas, and the rest, between transcendental mind and physical senses, between molecular biology and global ecology, and between quantum physics and astrophysics. And, this situatedness of humanity in such a transitional set of environments, with hardly any clear-cut distinguisher of the separate multiple polarities, characterized more by continuities, symbiosis, complexities, and so on, makes it a perpetual work in progress.

Posthumanism views the human just as Heraclitus viewed history- one of constant evolution and change. However, it does not rule out the antithetical position of constancy, one propounded by Parmenides, contending the hypothesis of conservation of matter, energy, and of big ideas, and any change being only of a form, state, or degree.

If anthropocentrism as a scientific or ethical position (taking the help of enlightened humanist ethics, nevertheless) is extremely difficult to defend, dualistic conceptions of humanism may, therefore, pose an even greater challenge to be defended. Posthumanism, therefore, is post-anthropocentric, post-humanistic, and post-dualistic. It is willing to engage humanism- whether biological, artificial, discursive, epistemological, and so on within its complex networks and assemblages of its evolution, its being, and becoming. It is willing to go beyond the more comfortable modern and even postmodern conceptions of human to make its study even more holistic, scientific, and enlightening.

The urgency for speculating and engaging with thoughts and theories that are post-anthropocentric, post-dualistic, and post-humanist is apparent in the 21st Century, where the fallout of the modern theories have peaked and necessitate the identification of newer paradigms. Humanism, Anthropocentrism, and Modernity have achieved their historical climax and the simultaneous beginning of the end in the Anthropocene, with its associated phenomena of industrialism, techno-capitalism, human population explosion (and of simultaneous breakdown of that of most other species), destruction of biodiversity (and the sixth mass extinction), massive pollution, climate change (and associated causes and outcomes), all necessitating newer modes of thoughts across dimensions.

Moreover, the increasing implementation of transhumanism by making major changes, and not merely enhancements, to the human condition (physical, cognitive, and so on), through the application of various forms of scientific and technological interventions may open a Pandora's box of challenges, from a conservative perspective. Among many possibilities is the one of a technological singularity, which may refer to a situation where a super intelligent machine and/or network may acquire unprecedented power, which it may misuse to further amass unimaginable power in a very short period, and may threaten the global status quo with overwhelming ramifications. Whether and of what kind various variants of transhumanism could be categorized as posthumanist and of what variety is a matter of intense ongoing debate. The major part of the debate is whether transhumanism qualifies as a posthuman paradigm or whether it is still largely embedded in and promotes further the modernist humanism and anthropocentrism. The further ontological changes manifested in the rise of machines, artificial intelligence, cyborgs, virtual networks, and so on, will make any assessment of a social situation even more exciting and complex.

Therefore, posthumanism must respond to the novel developments and emerge as a meta-theory that not only is an outcome of reactions against the ontological and discursive fallouts of the old, but also recognizes developments that are completely new and unaccounted for by preexisting theories.

Any possible invasion or incoming to earth of any alien species would further widen the scope of posthumanism, as, most speculatively, it would be better equipped to evolve and accommodate newer developments than present-day narrower and status-quoist anthropocentric paradigms would be expected to be. Anyway, study of such possibilities remains the subject of contemporary speculative posthumanism.

Posthumanism, therefore, will be a meta-theory or a group of theories or ideologies that would dialectically engage with one another to speculate, explain and evaluate various facet of the upcoming posthuman world, which promises extraordinary ontological and epistemological variations. Nothing less than a discursive, epistemological, and methodological revolution of sorts may suffice to account for and to respond to what is colloquially referred to as the posthuman turn in social sciences.

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