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Are we Posthuman yet? Things, Animals and Relations in Global Politics

Siamo già postumani? Cose, animali e relazioni nella politica globale

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Abstract. In this article, we survey the field of posthuman international relations and argue that contributions have focused on three main areas. Firstly, the influence of Bruno Latour is impossible to ignore. Many works have drawn on Actor Network Theory, highlighting the significance of non-human "actants" for outcomes in human affairs. The second area is the role of more-than-human animals in international affairs. Multiple contributions have highlighted that international relations are not exclusively a human domain. Finally, Milja Kurki's work, focusing on *relations* has opened the discipline to engaging with a variety of thinking that challenges the traditional focus on states. We conclude with an assessment of the posthuman contribution to International Relations to-date and argue that a fully posthuman discipline, essential to the survival of the human and many other species, will require a shift to pluriversal thinking.

Keywords: actants, more-than-human animals, relationality, pluriverse.

Riassunto. In questo articolo si indaga il campo delle relazioni internazionali postumane e si sostiene che i contributi in tale ambito si sono concentrati su tre aree principali. In primo luogo, è impossibile ignorare l'influenza di Bruno Latour. Molti lavori si sono ispirati alla Actor Network Theory, evidenziando l'importanza di "attori/agenti" non umani per i risultati negli affari umani. La seconda area riguarda il ruolo degli animali più-che-umani nelle questioni internazionali. Diversi

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contributi hanno evidenziato che le relazioni internazionali non sono un dominio esclusivamente umano. Infine, il lavoro di Milja Kurki, incentrato sulle *relazioni*, ha aperto la disciplina a una varietà di punti di vista che sfidano il tradizionale focus sugli Stati. Concludiamo con una valutazione di quello che è stato il contributo postumano alle relazioni internazionali fino ad oggi e sosteniamo che una disciplina pienamente postumana, essenziale per la sopravvivenza dell'uomo e di molte altre specie, richiederà un passaggio a un pensiero pluriversale.

Parole chiave: attori/agenti, animali più-che-umani, relazionalità, pluriverso.

1. Introduction

Bruno Latour (1993) famously suggested that "we" in the West have never really been modern,[1] while Donna Haraway (2004) has argued that "we" have never been human.[2] At the same time, and responding to such provocations, the cross-disciplinary field identifying itself as posthuman or posthumanist has sought to broaden scholarship beyond a humancentric notion of the human. This reconceptualization of the human means that our species is understood to be interdependent on and existing with a wide range of beings (such as the huge variety of non-human animal life) and things (including the living worlds of plants and soils, and non-living – depending on your perspective – matter of rock formations or sea waters and human artifacts and technologies). While such scholarship attends to the issues raised by Haraway and Latour around attachments and the humancentric human, the question of time is prescient. If we have never been human, can we ever be posthuman(ist)? Or perhaps we have, as Latour might put it, been living in a posthuman world "all along" despite those people thinking of themselves as "modern" being unaware of the "fact".

Travelling with Latour, Haraway and others, this paper reflects on these questions, considering whether we have always been posthuman, are increasingly or decreasingly posthuman or whether the realisation of posthumanist politics is an intellectual move yet to be fully realised. The paper begins with an exploration of the way "things" have become embedded in discussions of international politics, from guns, aeroplanes and drones to the infrastructures of border control. Second, we examine how humans are not the only species in the frames of global politics, considering the uses of non-human animals in warfare, securitisation, and human-

[1] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
[2] Haraway, "We have never been human," also Haraway in Gane "When we have never been human: What is to be done?".

itarian assistance, and animals as victims of war and exterminist politics. The third section of the paper reflects on the recent "turn" to relationality. This raises fundamental questions for the Western paradigm within which the discipline of International Relations has developed. Engagement with ideas from indigenous cosmology and the pluriverse have been important here, but the question of neo-colonial appropriation has sometimes troubled Western scholarly encounters. The paper will argue that approaches which centre relationality do hold promise in opening up both the discipline and the human sciences more widely to the challenge of rethinking the basic premises of Western thinking about what it means to be human, and in relation with other creatures and the things which compose our world.

2. Things

There has been an ongoing consideration of *things* in Global Politics which dates back to the early years of this century. The central claim here is that things have agency, they make a difference in the world, and humans exist in a network constituted of people and things. A key inspiration for this has been Actor Network Theory (ANT). While in its original formulation, ANT also includes more than human animals, a lot of the consideration in International Relations has focused on assemblages of humans and things. It is this work that we focus on here, while in the next section we turn specifically to more-than-human-animals.

The influence of Latour on the study of International Relations would be hard to overestimate. While there is not space to discuss his work in any detail here, as a strong advocate of considering the agency of things in the study of the social world, ANT and Science and Technology Studies (STS) have been instrumental in the inclusion of non-human actors in the study of global politics[3]. Bruno Latour's keynote address at the 2015 *Millennium* conference certainly contributed to an increased interest in his work.[4] For Latour, the material is significant and the study of the social world needs to proceed "without taking the boundary between matter and society as a division of labour between the natural and the social science."[5]

Within International Relations, few have explored the relevance of things as thoroughly as Jonathan Austin. Austin, following Latour, asks

[3] For a more in-depth discussion of Latour's work, see Cudworth & Hobden, *The Emancipatory Project*, ch. 4.
[4] Latour, "Onus Orbis Terrarum."
[5] Latour, "When Things Strike Back," 108.

whether the reader might consider gun control a good thing. If the answer is "yes", then the reader is, possibly unknowingly, a posthumanist. This is because they hold the view that things are not simply bystanders, rather they play a part in the action. Alongside a variety of other items that we encounter, whether they be safety measures in cars, teddy bears, office chairs, "all possess 'agency' in the sense that they change human behaviour." [6]

In a discussion of perpetration, Austin identifies three ways in which that agency is produced: by (pre-)scripting human behaviour; through a circulation of behaviour; and through compelling behaviour.[7] While Austin applies these concepts to acts of torture, they can also be used to reflect on other interactions between the human and the non-human. Consider, for example, social media and mobile devices. Tools, such as mobile devices, "can lay out 'scripts' for human behaviour in particular settings" so that we behave in particular patterns engaging with social media on our mobile devices – liking, disliking, responding and so on. What is also striking is the similarity in behaviours across cultures and generations – a circulation of behaviour. This circulation of behaviour, Austin argues, results from a range of "representational artifacts" that "circulate freely across time and space". There is, of course, an overlap here with the prescription of software applications. While the prescripting and circulating agency of non-human items "relates at its most basic level to the way that nonhuman things can 'suggest,' 'hint,' or 'whisper'"[8] behaviour, what is perhaps most striking about mobile devices is the way they *compel* behaviour. Ride any public transport in London and you will see a bus or carriage packed with people apparently glued to their mobile devices. Doomscrolling, the "compulsive reading of anxiety-inducing online content"[9] does not appear to be an activity totally under our control. In a different context though similar vein, Jane Bennett has pointed to the agency of potato chips. Many would probably agree when she notes that "to eat chips is to enter into an assemblage in which the I is not necessarily the most decisive operator."[10]

In an earlier article,[11] Austin analyzed the different roles that airplane technology played in the activities of death flights in Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s in comparison to instances of rendition carried out by the US as part of the so-called "war on terror". While there were similarities between these two operations, Austin argues that the differences

[6] Austin, "Posthumanism and Perpetrators," 170.
[7] Austin, "Posthumanism and Perpetrators," 172-76.
[8] Austin, "Posthumanism and Perpetrators," 175.
[9] Salisbury, "On not Being Able to read," 887.
[10] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 41
[11] Austin, "We Have Never been Civilized."

cannot be explained by differences in regime type, but rather in terms of differences between the functionality of different types of aeroplane. It is not that in carrying out acts of rendition the United States was acting in a more civilized way, the explanation lies in the greater safety and range of the aircraft available to the United States.

Enrike van Wingerden offers an alternate way of considering the roles of things in international relations. Van Wingerden argues that forms of research concerned with objects can be considered along three overlapping and intersected axes: agential things; manageable things and withdrawn things.[12] Agential things, are, as the name suggests, things which are considered outright as actors. In other words, they make a difference in the practices of global politics. They are not simply tools, but also possess agential capabilities. The notion of manageable things refers to the increasing interest on which international relations is played out alongside a concern with the maintenance of objects. One example of this is drones (further discussed below). Drones have become a subject of international debate and concern, and the attempt to manage them, and what this might include has become a significant issue in international debate. Finally, withdrawn things are those that are either unknowable, unmanageable or beyond human experience. As such, this axis is radically different from the first two which implied that things were at least knowable and potentially manageable. Drawing Graham Harman's work on Object-Oriented Ontology, these are things that are withdrawn, or only partially knowable. Timothy Morton's work on hyperobjects is central here – these are things that are so vast (such as climate change) that they are ultimately beyond human comprehension.

Technology has also played a significant role in Georgios Glouftsios' various discussions of border control infrastructures. Glouftsios has been particularly interested in the major role played by information systems in identifying travellers. Here, computer systems have agency for Glouftsios firstly because they supply border guards with intelligence about travelers, and whether they "embody risks". In other words, whether they have been categorized as a potential terrorist or criminal. A second way in which they have agency, Glouftsios argues, should "be understood in terms of the uncertainties and potential disruptions generated during their technical operations – for example, when they malfunction owing to different reasons, such as hardware failures and software bugs." In this way they "have uncertain and, at least sometimes, disrupting agency."[13] The implication of these two factors is that, firstly the technology in terms of hardware and

[12] Van Wingerden, "Putting 'things' first."
[13] Glouftsios, "Governing Border Security Infrastructures," 454.

software, "are complicit in producing the borders privilege the mobilities of some bodies while violently excluding others" and at the same time "may produce uncertainties in the work of those actors responsible for their maintenance." They are not "*passive* technologies."[14]

Likewise, software plays a significant role in Lauren Wilcox's analysis of drone warfare[15]. There is a considerable literature, both on the legality of drone warfare and growing concerns over the potential development of autonomous drones.[16] Wilcox draws on the case of a drone attack massacre on a group of Afghan civilians who had been wrongly identified as armed insurgents – they were unarmed, and had stopped to pray. What is at work here, she suggests is an assemblage where "three modes of producing targets, or killable bodies" were at work: "the algorithmic, visual, and affective."[17] Drone warfare, she argues is frequently seen as a disembodied form of warfare. On the contrary, it is thoroughly embodied. Wilcox, drawing in particular on feminist posthuman work,[18] understands

> the turn toward data and machine intelligence not as an 'other than-human' process of decision-making but as a form of embodiment that reworks and undermines essentialist notions of culture and nature, biology and technology, often but not necessarily in the service of projects of domination.[19]

Drones, even if we are considering supposedly autonomous ones, are part of an assemblage, which includes coders, databases, bureaucracies and military commands. Crucial in this process is the identifying of targets. Here, algorithms and databases become important actants. A variety of sources are used to draw up "patterns of life", or more accurately "patterns of death". These can be from internet or mobile phone usage, video data, spy plane information and supposedly suspicious patterns of behaviour. The use of this type of information permits the identifying of individuals who are perceived as nodes. Wilcox, drawing on Mbembe, describes this as a "necropolitical mode" involving "becoming-object of the human being; or the subordination of everything to impersonal logic and to the reign of calculability and instrumental rationality."[20] The case of the Afghan massacre also highlights the significance of visual aspects, and the problems of establishing a "positive identification" – theoretically

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[14] Glouftsios, "Governing Border Security Infrastructures," 457.
[15] Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War."
[16] On legality, see for example, Sterio, "The United States' use of drones in the War on Terror." On autonomous weapons, see Doyle, "Drone Warfare."
[17] Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War,"13.
[18] Specifically, that of N Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway.
[19] Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War," 15.
[20] Mbembe, quoted in Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War," 16.

required to permit a drone attack. While there was an attempt to establish a positive identification, benign activity "was interpreted as a sign of preparing to do something 'nefarious.'"[21] The third aspect of the assemblage, Wilcox argues is the affective, and here there are overlaps with Austin's discussion of the object creating scripts, circulation and compulsion.

> In drone warfare, fear circulates through the affective connections that members of the drone assemblage have for the troops on the ground as well as through the emotion of hate. The Predator crew, out of a sense of intimacy and identification with the troops on the ground, seeks to shore up this masculine identity through the production of racialized 'others' that must be destroyed.[22]

In previous work we have critiqued ANT, in particular its famed "flat ontology."[23] The implications of the flat ontology is that it is not possible to assess power differentials. In the initial gun and human question, that one might be a supporter of gun control does not mean that one is arguing that guns and humans are equally responsible for shootings. Guns certainly provide a context, a *possibility* of shooting that a non-gun owner does not possess. However, that is not the same as saying that a gun has the agency to cause a shooting. With reference to drones, if an autonomous drone kills someone, is the drone liable? Or is it the programmer that created the code that operates the drone, the military commander that launches the drone, or the government (or other actors) that authorised the conflict? In earlier work we have argued that the agency of non-human beings and things is significantly limited by the extent that human institutions and social practice have dominated conditions of life on our planet. Things might have "affective agency" in that they are caught up in patterns of social relations which enable them to have an effect as an object, but it is the social relations that enable the affect of the object.[24] In a recent discussion of the development of AI, Matteo Pasquinelli has emphasised the embodied human activity in the creation of so-called intelligence. Pasquinelli argues that discussions of AI to date have frequently overlooked "the role of collective knowledge and labour as the primary source of the very 'intelligence' that AI comes to extract, encode and commodify."[25] In other words, when we think about *things* they do not exist as autonomous entities. We are talking about machines and software

[21] Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War," 19.
[22] Wilcox, "Embodying Algorithmic War," 23.
[23] Cudworth and Hobden, *The Emancipatory Project*, ch. 4.
[24] Cudworth & Hobden, *The Emancipatory Project*, 47.
[25] Pasquinelli, *The Eye of the Master*, 17.

that is constituted by human labour. While these certainly give the potential for action, they can only be considered within particular sets of relations – a point we will return to in the third section.

3. Animals

Politics, along with other claimed unique features such as language, tool use, culture, is potentially claimed as a uniquely human activity. That this was demonstrably untrue has been established across a range of other species, most notably our close ape relatives.[26] Interspecies politics has been discussed across a range of other animals as diverse as ants,[27] worms,[28] dolphins[29] and elephants.[30] The rejection of practices associated with humans in other species has been described by Frans de Waal as "anthropodenial," by which he is referring to "the a priori rejection of humanlike traits in other animals, or animallike traits in us."[31] Donna Haraway has described such human exceptionalism as "the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies."[32] It is drawing attention to that "temporal web of interdependencies" that has been an increasing feature of discussions in International Relations which have addressed the particular significance of our relations with other species.

In our own work we have focussed on the use of more than human animals in the practice of war. We find it remarkable, given that war is a central concern of International Relations, that there has been so little attention given to the fact that the practice of war has always been, and continues to be reliant on the conscription of other species.[33] The array of other species ranges from the tiny – the use of microbes to spread illness to the large – the recent example of a suspected escaped whale from a Russian training facility.[34] While war has become increasingly mechanised, and less reliant, for example on horse-power, other species continue to play well recognised roles. In the Russian-Ukraine conflict, for example, dogs have played a significant role in mine clearing activities.[35]

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[26] De Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics*. Also see Cooke, *Bitch*, chapter 8.
[27] Franks *et al*, "Speed versus Accuracy."
[28] Meijer, "Worm politics."
[29] Connor & Peterson, *The Lives of Whales and Dolphins, p.?*
[30] Mateer, "Rebel Elephants."
[31] De Waal, *Are we Smart Enough?*, 25.
[32] Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 11.
[33] Cudworth & Hobden "The Posthuman Way of War."
[34] Cudworth and Hobden, *The Posthuman Way of War*. For a discussion of Hvladimir, the suspected Russian spy-whale, see Edwards, "Beloved Whale."
[35] Chao-Fong, "Ukraine's mine-sniffing dog."

Matthew Leep has also had a concern with animals at times of war, though his focus is on the suffering that conflict creates for other species, and the responsibilities of humans for the other-than-human. As he notes, there are many studies of human suffering, "but very little work explores the experiences of animals."[36] In developing a "posthuman cosmopolitanism", Leep seeks to draw insights from Derrida's work on hospitality, specifically related to other species. Derrida sought to unsettle the notion of the other or foreigner, and to disrupt the sharp distinction between the human and non-human. The delineation of the foreigner or animal is an exercise of power which allows the overlooking of the suffering of the other. Instead, cosmopolitanism extends the duties to the other and a posthuman move extends responsibilities for hospitality to the more-than-human. Leep quotes Derrida to indicate this responsibility: "say yes to who or what turns up... whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal."[37] Reflecting on the extermination programme exercised against stray dogs by the US army during the occupation of Iraq, Leep argues that these "ghosts" should promote in us a push for an "anticipatory belongingness". "Ghosts of the past" Leep suggests, "cannot be salvaged, but they might be remembered, appropriated, and consequently haunt us in potentially productive ways."[38]

Away from a specific focus on conflict, Benjamin Meiches has provided a detailed discussion of the role of more than human animals in roles associated with humanitarian practice.[39] Meiches begins his discussion with a contradiction – that the practice of humanitarianism appears to place a specific emphasis on the human while at the same time excluding the more than human. Drawing on discussions from Levinas and Kant, he asks "what does it suggest if the most radical defense of humanitarian ethics also expresses hostility and resentment at the possibility that a nonhuman animal could enact humanitarian practices or perform humanitarian duties?"[40] At the core of humanitarianism is a care for the other, but in standard accounts, the border lies at the species edge rather than considering the more-than-human. As a result, it overlooks the inherent capacity of other species to perform acts of care, "to cohabit, clean wounds, and forge affiliations in ways that are normative in human communities". Despite the evidence of more than human animals having a capacity to care for the suffering of others, "humanitarianism clings to an exclu-

[36] Leep, "Stray Dogs," 47.
[37] Derrida, quoted in Leep, "Stray Dogs," 54.
[38] Leep, "Stray Dogs," 65.
[39] Meiches, *Nonhuman Humanitarians.*
[40] Meiches, *Nonhuman Humanitarians*, 5.

sively human image of agency."[41] In challenging that perception, Meiches details the work of a range of nonhuman humanitarians. In addition to the work of dogs in removing mines, Meiches assesses the significant roles that cows and goats have played in the provision of humanitarian aid. We could concur that as actors in humanitarian and combat situations, various animal species are demonstrating an agency that is very different to the guns and drones we encountered in the previous section. As sentient creatures with understandings of and views about the world, animals such as dogs are not tools (as are guns) but use their knowledge and skills and shared understandings (acquired through training), in co-operation with human handlers in order to effect a change in the world.[42] This ability of some non-human animals in some contexts to shape their circumstances, we have previously described as "transformative agency."[43]

Meiches additionally stresses the conscripted character of nonhuman humanitarian work. He develops the concept of "anthropocentric reason" to highlight the situations where nonhuman animals are seen as "useful or disposable instruments exclusively for human ends."[44] As we have found in the field of warfare, in the humanitarian field it is the deployment of the useful characteristics, whether sensory, productive, or emotive that motivates the use of the more than human, and those non-humans have little say in the matter.

In a perhaps surprising move, Meiches also details the crucial work undertaken by rats. While dogs are celebrated for their role in clearing mines, rats are also suited to this activity, as they have comparable olfactory capacity to dogs. Rats have also been used to scent out instances of diseases such as tuberculosis in disaster areas. However, in carrying out humanitarian activities, rats confront a reputational problem. They are often considered with disgust, despite their many qualities. Meiches argues that "there are strong biological and social continuities between rats and humans."[45] Rats lead complex social and emotional lives and have high cognitive capacity.[46]

The liminal circumstances of rats has also been discussed by Rafi Youatt. As for Meiches there are important questions about the position of rats given the historical distaste which humans have had for the species. Rather than focus on their utility, Youatt considers their social position

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[41] Meiches, *Nonhuman Humanitarians*, 9.
[42] See Cudworth & Hobden, "The Posthuman Way of War," also Smith et al. "Becoming with a police dog."
[43] Cudworth & Hobden, *The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism*, 47.
[44] Meiches, *Nonhuman Humanitarians*, 15.
[45] Meiches, *Nonhuman Humanitarians*, 79.
[46] Burt, *Rat*.

and "the ways that they matter to the entwined politics and ecology of the contemporary era."[47] As a species, rats have prospered wherever human communities have developed, and despite centuries of attempts at extermination, driven by fears of pestilence and disruption of agricultural surplus, rats, like humans have achieved a global footprint. At the same time rats have featured in the human imaginary as a term for other humans that we dislike. To call someone a "rat" is to indicate that they are untrustworthy. To describe a population as rats indicates that they are considered vermin, and hence also candidates for extermination. Yet an increased engagement with other species on the part of International Relations theorists reflects changes in the discipline away from a solely human focus to a consideration of the embedded character of human existence in a range of other forms of life. A consideration of our relations with rats are just one example of this. Youatt describes this shift as "*interspecies internationality*," a "particular way to understand the co-mingling of the geopolitical and the ecological."[48] As such, Youatt argues rats provide a paradigmatic example of thinking about the different ways that interspecies internationality plays out in biological, metaphorical and practical forms. For rats, this plays out through three dimensions: extermination – in the form of widespread practices of (attempted) elimination; ecology – through the thinking out of our relations with other species; and experimentation through the widespread use of rats in laboratory experiments. Together these elements reveal, "an intertwined politics of life."[49]

Rats are not the only species which has confronted extermination polices. Matthew Leep develops an elegiac drift narrative to mourn the cull of minks in Denmark as a result of misplaced concerns that they potentially spread the Covid-19 virus. Mink, he argues are caught at an intersection in global politics, caught between "the global industrialisation of mink life" and "congested forms of profitable captivity" which result in farmed animals potentially developing viruses perceived as a threat to human well-being.[50] The aim of the drift narrative is to both mourn the millions of mink deaths as a result of the culls and to disrupt conventional International Relations narratives: "an attempt to reimagine our multispecies pasts and futures by attending to the erasure of nonhuman dreams under the operations of animal capital."[51]

The contributions to the International Relations literature featuring more-than-human animals have stressed that any account of global politics

[47] Youatt, "Interspecies Politics and the Global Rat," 241.
[48] Youatt, "Interspecies Politics and the Global Rat," 246. Also see Youatt, *Interspecies Politics*.
[49] Youatt, "Interspecies Politics and the Global Rat," 249.
[50] Leep, "Specters of minks," 238.
[51] Leep, "Specters of minks," 259.

that does not include other species is incomplete. All aspects of the practice of international relations include a more than human aspect. Even diplomacy, perhaps that most human-focused aspect of the discipline, has been queried for its lack of engagement across species boundaries.[52] The discussions thus far have stressed how the practices of international relations are far from a human only enterprise. Whatever the focus, whether war, the global economy, migration or the environment international processes involve a complex web of species interactions. While historically international relations may have been perceived as a human only activity, a growing number of scholars are challenging this perception, and focussing on specific other "critters," or analysing how the conventional concerns of the discipline cannot be considered through an exclusively human framework. This focus on the more than human, has also developed through an increasing focus on relations in global politics, to which we now turn.

4. Relations

The move to thinking relationally is perhaps one of the most significant recent developments in International Relations. This is somewhat ironic given that the name adopted by the discipline is International *Relations*.[53] What is at stake here is that, not only in International Relations, but across the social sciences, there has been a focus on things, seeing them as autonomous to the relations that they have with other things. The relational move across the social sciences is not to ignore things, but to focus on inter-relationality. Rather than a focus on actors the relational move shifts to taking relations first and considering how those agents involved in relations are a product of those relations, not independent of them. As Amaya Querajazu argues, the western approach which focuses on things is complicit in the rift between humans and the more-than-human, by overlooking the tapestry of relations between humans and the rest of nature. As she argues such, "atomistic ontologies refer to a type of rationality founded on the premise that entities are singular 'essences' that exist on their own as separate, present, and definable."[54]

Highly influential in the development of relational thinking in International Relations is the work of the physicist/philosopher Karen Barad. Her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* has been drawn upon across a wide range of the social sciences. In this work she draws and develops the think-

[52] Fougner, "Animals and Diplomacy;" Leira and Neumann. "Beastly Diplomacy."
[53] As opposed to, for example, International Politics.
[54] Querajazu, "Cosmopraxis," 876.

ing of the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, and in particular his philosophical musings on quantum physics. Barad draws on this thinking to advance two significant concepts: intra-action and agential realism. Intra action draws on Bohr's discussions concern the relationship between objects and measuring agencies which he sees as inseparable. For Barad this leads to the conclusion that "determinate entities do not exist… determinate entities emerge from their intra-action."[55] It is the relations between entities that is crucial not the perception of inviolate individuals. These relations, Barad describes as phenomena, "dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world."[56]

This inseparability between entities leads to Barad's second central concept – agential realism. The ontology of agential realism is matter. Matter seen as an active and creative force. "Matter's dynamism" Barad argues, "is generative not merely in the sense of bringing new things into the world but in the sense of bringing forth new worlds, of engaging in an ongoing reconfiguring of the world."[57] Hence the concept of intra-action is not an exclusively human activity, but one between matter in all its forms. As such Barad's work provides a fundamental challenge to Western atomistic human-centric thinking.

At the forefront of challenges to atomistic thinking is Milja Kurki's call for the development of a relational International Relations.[58] Kurki argues that a 'relational revolution' is occurring across the social sciences. Confronting the possible demise of our species, Kurki argues that we "seem unable not only to productively tackle our condition, but also to grasp it."[59] The discipline of International Relations remains wedded to the human "reality" of a sharp distinction between human and more-than-human worlds while ignoring "the real", of the inseparability of human life with the rest of nature. For Kurki, taking relationality seriously is revolutionary for the discipline because it enables the necessary conversations to be had on posthumanism, decoloniality, ethics, science and democracy.[60]

While there is an increased pace in the inclusion of relational thinking, as Kurki points out, the foundations have been in place for some time. Patrick Jackson and Daniel Nexon were making a call for a development that placed "relations before states" in 1999.[61] Likewise, although not self-identifying as a relational approach, the social constructivism of Alexan-

[55] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 128.
[56] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141.
[57] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 170.
[58] Kurki, *International Relations*.
[59] Kurki, *International Relations*, 191.
[60] Kurki, "Relational Revolution."
[61] Jackson and Nexon, "Relations Before States."

der Wendt argued that state identities emerged out of their mutual interactions.[62] The view that individuals are not autonomous from their circumstances has also been a feature of critical approaches such as Marxism, Critical theory, feminist and postcolonial approaches.[63]

Crucial here has been an engagement with thinking outside of the western tradition. The western tradition which has tended to impose binary separations (such as human/non-human or nature/culture) and reduce International Relations as a discipline only to the study of the human. David Blaney and Tamara Trownsell advocate a "recrafting" of the discipline. Drawing on the work of Nick Onuf, they argue that the process of becoming an academic is parallel to developing a craft. However, the downside of developing that craft is that one becomes entrapped within a particular worldview. They argue that "IR's traditional tools privilege certain perceptive angles and senses to such a degree that the virtuoso performance of our craft often blinds us to what we are missing and limits our ability to understand other forms of worlding."[64] But crafting is not a neutral process. It also draws into worlding – the process of reproducing the world. Caught in a specific worldview as developed through craft leads us to reproduce that world through our writing and teaching.

The purpose of recrafting is to develop alternate ways of seeing and thinking about the world. While this has been a consistent feature of the discipline,[65] much to-date has been a development of thinking within the western tradition. Instead, they are for and approach that allows thinking that is "world multiply." Central to this project is the need to recraft through an engagement with a relational world as opposed to one where entities are seen as existing outside of their relational context. Worlding multiply requires an acknowledgement of a plurality of worlds reflecting differing cosmologies, and developing the capacity to engage with this plurality without reducing one world view to another. While in the western academy, feminist and poststructuralist thinking might be taught as additions to the standard Realist and Liberal positions in International Relations, "we still leave our students blind to the question of our most basic ontological assumptions and unprepared to world multiply."[66] To overcome this problem would require, on the one hand, encouraging students to engage "with the intersubjectively co-constituted time-spacescapes that make a pluriverse."[67]

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[62] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it."
[63] Kurki, "Relational Revolution," 824.
[64] Blaney and Trownsell, "Recrafting International Relations," 50.
[65] For example, the positivist-postpositive debate of the 1990s marked a significant shift in ontological, epistemological and methodological bases of the discipline.
[66] Blaney and Trownsell, "Recrafting International Relations," 55.
[67] Blaney and Trownsell, "Recrafting International Relations," 55.

This would require learning how different cosmologies rely on different and incommensurate ontologies, not easily grasped with the traditional IR framework. Recrafting would also require developing empathy with alternate worldviews at odds with those inherited. This would involve developing a capacity to engage with multiple perspectives. Blaney and Townsell argue that "existential ontological resilience and versatility involve not just familiarity with plural frameworks or paradigms and how to apply them, as in most syllabi's learning objectives, but actual existential agility in being/knowing/doing multiplicity."[68] A shift to an engagement with relations over entities is central to this process of recrafting.

However, as Querejazu argues, a shift from the atomistic perspective of Western International Relations to a relational account is not going to be straightforward. There is a danger in moving away from a perception of a world primarily made of things to seeing relations as constitutive to repeat the processes of reification. To resist this danger, Querejazu advocates focussing on the *how* of relations rather than the *what*. She argues that the notion of cosmopraxis avoids the reification problem "by using some relational ways or relating that can inform our understanding of a pluriversal IR." [69] She summarises her argument as follows:

> If one believes that cosmical matters are key to explaining and defining existence, one will accept other dimensions as part of reality; whereas if one believes that there is a differentiation between the human world and the rest as inanimate matter, then only human actions and human dimensions will be relevant to define reality.[70]

If the world as experienced is created through the actions of human and more than human animals and the underlying cosmological order reflects a focus on relations, then the social orders that emerge will reflect that, and be more responsive to alternate worldviews. Likewise, the form of worlding in a cosmological order that is focused on an atomistic reality will result in specific forms of norms, laws and social organisation, and will "leave the other-than-human, and the cosmical dimensions out of the equation."[71]

Cosmopraxis is the term that Querajazu uses to describe the position of being open to multiple realities. This view has also been employed by Koen De Munter and Nicole Note in their analysis drawn from anthropological work with the Aymara community of Peru. For De Munter and Note, Aymara traditions and practices represent a radical alternative to Western

[68] Blaney and Townsell, "Recrafting International Relations," 55.
[69] Querajazu, "Cosmopraxis," 878.
[70] Querajazu, "Cosmopraxis," 882.
[71] Querajazu, "Cosmopraxis," 882.

"worldviews." For the Aymara the focus is on experiencing, "transmitting and interchanging their way of going about the world in a dynamic way of everyday, ritual and celebratory acting, and less on conceptually grasping it."[72] Inherent in Aymara thought is a sense of "plurivalence." the sense that things and experience are neither one thing nor another, but *both*. For De Munter and Note this is exemplified in the Aymara term *ina*, meaning "maybe yes *and* maybe no."[73] In the Aymara world, things are never specifically good or bad, but both, or good and bad alternately. Similarly, the term *nayra* refers both to the future and to the past, which are not seen as distinctive temporalities. Aymara "cultural intuitions intertwine in the sense that all human and natural events that become interrelated within the all-encompassing *pacha* will never be good *or* bad (masculine *or* feminine, etc.), but can and will always combine both qualities *along the way*."[74] For the Aymara there is a "*moving* 'multiple world' constituted by the nurturing interrelationships between animals, plants and humans alike."[75]

The notion of cosmopraxis captures this notion of an inherently relational and pluriversal existence, at odds with a western 'god's eye' and atomistic perspective. However, while Aymaran thinking appears to be embedded in an inherently pluriversal world, and could contribute to the worlding, or crafting of such a world, it is a jump from Western relational thinking to such an approach which is both relational and pluriversal. The dangers of reification as raised by Querejazu are worth further reflection. The problem also exists the other way round, pluriversal thinking is not inherently relational. Western thinking is as much part of a pluriverse as Aymaran. Furthermore, some aspects of the pluriverse are more aligned to the flourishing of life on the planet than are others. Should we be empathetic to those aspects which appear to be antithetical to the thriving of human and other forms of life?

A further issue is that the "Western tradition" is often represented as "Other" in discussions of the pluriverse and the contributions of alternate cosmologies. However, within "Western" philosophy and political thought, writing about human relations with non-human nature has involved both engaging with non-Western cosmology, and excavating the Western tradition for subjugated knowledge and positions. For example, Freya Mathews interpretation of Spinoza is that his ethics does not only embrace the individual self in connection with the (natural world) but also the self as connected with diverse others within a greater whole; an ethic of

[72] De Munter and Note, "Cosmopraxis and contextualising," 89.
[73] De Munter and Note, "Cosmopraxis and contextualising," 93.
[74] De Munter and Note, "Cosmopraxis and contextualising," 94.
[75] De Munter and Note, "Cosmopraxis and contextualising," 99.

interconnectedness.[76] Here and elsewhere, there are examples of thinking which does not fit the Enlightenment narrative of Western political philosophy on which Matthews and others writing in political ecologism draw.

Val Plumwood's final and unfinished project was the development of philosophical animism which acknowledged but did not appropriate indigenous understandings of the world[77] but sought to look for common threads within the diversity of "Western" thinking. This drew on Plumwood's understandings of the culture of Aboriginal Australians who "live in a world that is buzzing with multitudes of sentient beings, only a very few of which are human".[78] For Plumwood, it is Western arrogance which fails to understand that humans are the only creatures who speak and possess an active voice.[79] The key philosophical task as she saw it was "a thorough and open rethink which has the courage to reopen our [Western] most basic cultural narratives".[80] The "door" through which we might do this is openness to interspecies communication. In earlier work Plumwood outlined this ethical stance as one that is not interested in truth claims, but in recognition and the kind of stance or position that enables Western humans to appreciate that "earth others [are] fellow agents and narrative subjects".[81] As Deborah Bird Rose notes, being aware of nature "in the active voice" implies the need to be listening, or rather, to be paying attention to what is said "in a living world of multiple languages."[82] She concludes that Plumwood's common threads for a philosophical animalism would be the understanding that "not all persons are human" and "the centrality of relations."[83]

In addition to being open to the multiple realities of the world in cosmopraxis and acknowledging pluriversal understandings, being open to multi-species relationality and the embedding of "humanity" with/in other worlds is a way of recasting the Western modern imperial world view to enable "paths towards others" (in Plumwood's words).

5. Conclusion

We have long argued that discipline of International Relations remains wedded to the Western human understanding of "reality", the

[76] Matthews, *For Love of Matter*.
[77] Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's philosophical animism," 95.
[78] Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's philosophical animism," 95.
[79] Plumwood, "Nature in the active voice."
[80] Plumwood, "Nature in the active voice," 113.
[81] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 176.
[82] Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's philosophical animism," 102.
[83] Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's philosophical animism," 96.

foundations of which are a sharp distinction between human and more-than-human worlds while ignoring "the real", of the inseparability of human life with the rest of nature. Any version of the "international" which excludes a discussion of our relations with the rest of nature is, we would claim, incomplete. Relational thinking is a thread that pulls us away from humancentrism and "a call to enter into encounters, to be co-present and engaged"[84] with a multiplicity and beings and things caught up in the complex systems of global politics. It is a meta-theoretical call for a recasting of the pillars on which the dominant narratives of the Western political tradition has depended.

Our own answer to Latour's challenge is that no, we have never been modern because the apparent cornerstones of our worldview and practices have always been riven with difference and interpretation. The European project of "purification"[85] was doomed from the start – the upshot of the endeavoured separation from the rest of nature and a precursor to the environmental crisis we confront. The lesson from indigenous writings is that this was always sure to be a futile project. In response to Haraway, we would say that "we" cannot approximate to the ideal of Vitruvian man from which most humans are inevitably excluded, nor is the human individual separate from interdependencies and co-constitutions with other beings. We have indeed, never been human, an undertaking that Foucault evocatively described as being as insecure as a face drawn in the sand.[86]

As for our own question, as to whether we "are posthuman yet", this is something of a trick also. This paper has considered how "things" have a place in thinking about international politics and the ways key political practices involve dependencies on and the destruction of more-than-human-animal life. There is no posthuman condition to which we might aspire. Rather, for those of us who think with posthumanism, "we" are brought into being in a world of connections with other creatures, human and not, and with a multiplicity of things, animate and not, on whom we depend and which we impact.

So, "yes" we are most definitely posthuman, and have never been anything else. However, the realisation of a posthumanist politics is an *intellectual* move yet to be fully achieved. We can only be encouraged when we see the burgeoning of scholarship recasting political concepts, adding in non-human beings and things to the scope of the political and questioning the human and our relations with the non-human lifeworld. This has very often involved a framing of relationality which for us holds considera-

[84] Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's philosophical animism," 107.
[85] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 11.
[86] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

ble promise in opening up "doors" or "pathways", to follow Plumwood, to a more inclusive and ethical standpoint from which to learn about our world.

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