

# Introduction

## Posthumanism meets Political Philosophy. For a Critical Posthumanist Reading of Political Philosophy

### Introduzione

#### Il postumanismo incontra la filosofia politica. Per una lettura postumanista critica della filosofia politica

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**Abstract.** The contemporary landscape – marked by climate change, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, species extinction, and the shifting boundaries of the political community as we used to intend it – demands an urgent rethinking of inherited categories, to reassess the foundational concepts and frameworks of political philosophy. This monographic issue aims at responding to that demand by collecting and enhancing contributions that explore how the philosophical – scientific field of posthumanism(s), with its many cultural lines of thought, can inform, critique, and revitalise the theoretical way of coping with politics. This monographic issue offers a transdisciplinary inquiry into what it might mean to think – and act – politically in a more-than-human world. In doing so, it affirms the relevance of political philosophy while recognizing that its future lies in a posthuman expanded horizon – one that includes not only human reason and will, but also the agencies, materialities, and relations that shape our shared planetary conditions.

**Keywords:** posthuman turn, posthumanities and political philosophy, post-anthropocentrism, feminist posthumanism, animal studies, IA public sphere and autonomy, ecocritical political philosophy, posthuman international relations, up/down politics, dystopias and techno-human evolution.

**Riassunto.** Il panorama contemporaneo – segnato dai cambiamenti climatici, dall'intelligenza artificiale, dalle biotecnologie, dall'estinzione delle specie e dallo spostamento dei confini della comunità politica così come la intendevamo – richiede un urgente ripensamento delle categorie ereditate, per rivalutare i concetti fondamentali e i quadri di riferimento della filosofia politica. Questo numero monografico intende rispondere a questa esigenza, raccogliendo e valorizzando contributi che esplorano come il campo filosofico-scientifico del postumanesimo (o dei postumanesimi), con le sue molteplici linee di pensiero culturali, possa informare, criticare e rivitalizzare il modo teorico di affrontare la politica. Esso offre un'indagine transdisciplinare su cosa possa significare pensare e agire politicamente in un mondo oltre-umano. In questo modo, afferma la rilevanza della filosofia politica, riconoscendo che il suo futuro si colloca in un orizzonte postumano allargato, che include non solo la ragione e la volontà umana, ma anche gli agenti, gli aspetti materiali e le relazioni che danno forma alle nostre condizioni planetarie condivise.

**Parole chiave:** svolta postumana, posthumanities e filosofia politica, post-antropocentrismo, postumanismo femminista, animal studies, autonomia e sfera pubblica dell'intelligenza artificiale, filosofia politica ecocritica, relazioni internazionali postumane, politica up/down, evoluzione distopica e tecnomana.

1) This monographic issue of the *Rivista Italiana di Filosofia Politica* addresses an urgent and fertile intersection in contemporary thought: the encounter between political philosophy and the philosophical – scientific field of posthumanism(s) with its many cultural lines of thought. *On one hand*, Posthumanism is not a monolithic movement. It includes diverse approaches – ranging from philosophical and critical posthumanism, to feminist posthumanities, to new materialism, speculative realism, transhumanism, and beyond. They converge around a shared critique of the so called “anthropocentric/humanist” legacy. Central to these currents is a refusal of the dualisms that have structured modern Western thought: human/animal, nature/culture, subject/object, mind/body, theory/practice. In their place, posthumanist thinkers propose relational ontologies, materialist epistemologies, and ecological or technopolitical frameworks that challenge both the centrality of the human and its autarchic recognition process and knowledge making. *On the other side*, in a historical moment marked by ecological crises, disrupting technological transformations, loss of shared meanings of ‘what the human *is* and what it is worth to *be* human’, politi-

cal philosophy as field of theoretical knowledge on politics is called to mobilise its hidden, unexplored potentialities. Political philosophy in its western form, having been (mostly) shaped by anthropocentric assumptions, has been slow so far to engage with such a crucial change of paradigm. And yet, the contemporary landscape – marked by climate change, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, species extinction, and the shifting boundaries of the political community as we used to intend it – demands an urgent and inescapable rethinking of inherited categories, to reassess its foundational concepts and frames of reference. This issue responds to that demand by collecting and enhancing contributions that explore how posthumanist thinking can inform, critique, and revitalise political philosophy.

What is called the “posthuman turn” in Humanities and Social Sciences has become salient to the point that “Posthumaniti(es)” is being framed as a critical field of academic research as such, already a feature of the landscape and also still in rapid development. The major aim of this special issue is therefore to shed light on the contribution that a Posthumanist lens brings to political philosophical perspectives, concepts, and dimensions. In particular with reference to:

- a) the terminological, epistemological, and philosophical-political facets of the posthumanist conceptual universe.
- b) the re-definition/re-shaping of a diverse political human centrality in the *nature-culture continuum*, in its materiality, embodied perspectives in an ecological-political framework and in the re-evaluation of the non-human binary.
- c) the transversal relations between the political philosophy of the present and feminist political epistemology, new materialism, international relations theory (see for instance the recognition of non-human legal subjectivities), philosophy of technology, political science, philosophy, political sociology, political ecology, feminist cybertheories, among others.

These disciplinary knowledges have reasserted themselves in response to their contact with the Posthumanist paradigm that has decentralized the human with respect to living species, artificial entities, states of matter, the ecosystem and the cosmos, expanding the range of responses that we humans owe, *with epistemic and political codes to be renewed at the root*, to the variety of classes of non-human interlocutors and to environmental, energy and climate challenges.

II) Out of this debate, posthumanism, particularly in its critical and feminist articulations, emerges not only as a paradigm among many others but as a meta-theoretical source of several and potential unlimited political and epistemological provocations and challenges.

The guiding question for this special issue is therefore both simple and profound: What does political philosophy *become* when it takes the posthuman turn seriously? What happens to concepts such as subjectivity, autonomy, justice, power, and political agency when they are decentred from the human subject, and rearticulated in relation to non-human animals, technological agents, material environments, and complex interspecies entanglements?

Three thematic vectors orient the inquiry. Firstly, the epistemological and ontological reframing: posthumanism destabilizes established epistemic hierarchies, opening up new forms of knowledge production that are situated, relational, embodied, and non-anthropocentric. It questions who or what can be a subject of knowledge, rights, and politics. Secondly, material, technological and ecological embeddedness: many posthumanist perspectives emphasize the materiality of bodies, technologies and environments. Political subjectivity is rethought not as an abstract or disembodied capacity but as situated within a nature-culture continuum that includes technological artifacts, ecological systems, and multispecies communities. Thirdly, political implications and institutional reconfigurations: posthumanism invites political philosophy to address the changing nature of governance, justice, and rights in light of new agents (e.g., non-human animals, rivers, AI, robots), new publics (e.g., multispecies or digital collectives), and new imaginaries (e.g., post-anthropocentric utopias, heterotopias or dystopias).

The essays in this issue exemplify the pluralism of posthumanist thought while remaining attentive to political questions: conflict, agency, normativity, and emancipation. By doing so, they aim to establish a dialogue between political philosophy and posthumanities as an emergent field of fruitful enquiry – between the conceptual rigor of theorizing and the disruptive force of posthumanist critique.

This issue aims to address the complexity of these multi-layered intersections in the following ways. First, Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden in *Are We Posthuman Yet? Things, Animals and Relations in Global Politics* examine the implications of posthumanist theory for International Relations (IR), a field of scholarship traditionally dominated by anthropocentric and state-centric paradigms. They identify three major trends in posthuman IR: the influence of Actor-Network Theory and Bruno Latour's conception of non-human "actants"; the integration of more-than-human animals into analyses of global political processes (especially war, humanitarianism, and imperialism); and the turn toward relational and pluriversal ontologies that challenge Eurocentric and anthropocentric assumptions. The authors critically engage with the limits of flat ontology in Latourian approaches and advocate instead for a political theory that

centres relations – one that recognizes both the embeddedness of human and non-human actors in dynamic and historically situated networks, and also the divergent extents to which these networks are stratified by hierarchical power relations both between human and other beings and things, and also the ways intra-human relations of inclusion and exclusion are bound up with relational landscapes of co-constitution with the more-than-human.

Following this same path, Federica Timeto in a contribution in Italian, titled *Dal riconoscimento al coinvolgimento: la svolta animale nelle scienze (post)umane e le sue implicazioni politiche* addresses the “animal turn” within posthumanist scholarship, focusing on its implications for political theory and practice. Situating herself within the field of Feminist Animal Studies, she critiques the continued reliance on rationalist epistemologies that reinforce human exceptionalism, even within ostensibly progressive discourses. Instead, she turns to Animal Standpoint Theory – a framework that combines feminist epistemology with interspecies ethics – as a means of fostering situated, dialogical, and relational knowledge practices. Timeto’s essay explores how a politically engaged posthumanism can transform the traditional subject of knowledge, build new modes of multispecies justice, and realign the aims of the human sciences with non-human perspectives and claims.

Relating to an analogous issue, Ilaria Santoemma’s paper, *Posthumanities’ New Subjectivities: What Contribution from Critical Feminist Posthumanism to the Contemporary Political Philosophical Debate?* explores how critical posthumanism, particularly in its feminist articulation, reconfigures core categories of political philosophy. Drawing on the notion of a “disjunctive paradigm,” the author develops a “Topology of Ruptures” to analyze how dominant models of subjectivity – such as the autonomous, rational, rights-bearing individual – exclude marginalized alterities. After a close reading of the legacy and contribution of feminist theory to the definition of posthumanism, the paper addresses the legal recognition of the Magpie River’s personhood in Canada. The case study demonstrates how feminist posthumanism enables an expanded understanding of political agency, one that includes non-human subjects and challenges the epistemological foundations of classical liberalism. The paper articulates a vision of politics grounded in intersectionality, relational ontologies, non-human agency and ecological justice.

Furthermore, in *Animal Magnetism: Notes for an Ecocritical Political Philosophy in the Anthropocene*, Diego Rossello reinterprets the historical concept of “animal magnetism” – associated with Mesmerism and Enlightenment-era theories of vital fluid – as a metaphor and methodological tool for ecocritical political thought. The essay uncovers surpris-

ing genealogies of political affectivity and interconnection, linking 18th-century notions of energetic harmony with contemporary concerns about the Anthropocene. Rossello argues that animal magnetism offers a symbolic resource for reimagining political life as fundamentally entangled with non-human forces. Drawing connections between Mesmer's ideas, revolutionary politics, and modern ecological theory, the essay contributes to a growing body of work that seeks to resacralize the political through enchantment, affect, and interspecies interdependence.

Building on a perspective more related to political technology, Salvo Vaccaro, in *La cifra della politica. Intelligenza artificiale, Sfera pubblica e autonomia* critically interrogates the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping contemporary public spheres and political subjectivities. Starting from a Habermasian framework, the essay raises pressing questions: How does political autonomy survive in a digital landscape saturated with algorithmic governance, deep learning, and informational asymmetries? Can subjectivity remain a locus of agency when the production of opinion and perception is increasingly mediated by non-transparent technological systems? Vaccaro argues that AI has introduced a new form of heteronomy into the political process, exacerbating democratic deficits and undermining the conditions for rational deliberation. The essay calls for a renewed philosophical engagement with digital epistemologies and their normative consequences.

Finally, further developing this technological critique, Alexander Thomas, in *Up/Down Politics and Techno-Human Evolution: Utopias, Dystopias, and Pluralistic Futures* proposes a new conceptual framework – “upwing” and “downwing” politics – to capture emerging political cleavages in the context of techno-human evolution. Whereas “upwing” politics aligns with transhumanist aspirations of transcendence, abundance, and superintelligence, “downwing” perspectives prioritize ecological humility, interdependence, and critique of instrumental rationality. Drawing from systems theory, cybernetics, and political theory, the essay contrasts the utopian fantasies of Silicon Valley with the pluralistic, grounded imaginaries of degrowth, bioconservatism, and posthumanist critique. Thomas contends that the future of political thought lies in the creative contestation between these two orientations, with “downwing” politics offering more viable frameworks for navigating existential risk, environmental collapse, and the limits of human control.

As can be seen from the short descriptions of the contributions, the present special issue of *Rivista Italiana di Filosofia Politica* does not aim to offer a definitive synthesis between political philosophy and Posthumanism. Rather, the intention of this special issue is to open up a space of theoretical and political experimentation, in which concepts, disciplines, and

assumptions are tested, stretched, and rearticulated. By bringing together voices from feminist theory, animal studies, international relations, and critical technology studies, the volume offers a transdisciplinary inquiry into what it might mean to think – and act – politically in a more-than-human world. In doing so, it affirms the relevance of political philosophy while recognizing that its future lies in an expanded horizon – one that includes not only human reason and will, but also the agencies, materialities, and relations that shape our shared planetary condition. The collection provides some pointers for readers in developing a more timely and inclusive political philosophy that reflects the embodied human condition in a landscape of relations with a multiplicity of other beings and things. This is at once both a normative *and* a scientific project and imperative. It is scientific in showing how the legacies of political philosophy lead us, and contribute to, the current posthumanist turn in the humanities and social sciences. A posthumanist political philosophy is therefore more accurate in seeking to account for the materially situated condition of non-human and human lifeways. Posthumanist thinking is also an imperative for normative political theory in responding to the key question of our times: how ought we to live, to think and to be human in responsible relation with the other beings and things on and with which we depend? In the context of the existential threat posed by climate change and biodiversity loss, the richness or poverty of political philosophy may be come to be measured in its collective ability to face the challenge of the posthumanist turn, to embrace it, to run with it and to respond with the innovation and the passion this most fundamental challenge demands.