MONIST POST-HUMANISM OR ANALOGICAL NEW HUMANISM?

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The new ecological challenges, as well as the challenges of decolonial and feminist thinking – in essence, what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "epistemologies of the south"[1] and which are not only of the south – have provoked various deconstructions of the humanist tradition, as it is considered anthropocentric or asymmetrical and, for that very reason, not adequate to a new understanding of the human place and task in the planet as a whole. These deconstructions have led either to the proposal of a new humanism, or even to the proposal of a post-humanism (or even anti-humanism). In both cases, however, what is at stake is the attempt to overcome the so-called anthropocentrism of Western culture, especially of modernity.

My purpose here is to make a brief approach to some contemporary proposals for overcoming anthropocentrism, which assume a clearly post-humanist or even anti-humanist position. Suggesting an interpretation of these positions from their philosophical background, I propose an alternative reading, which can be considered post-anthropocentric, at least in a certain sense, but which follows a different philosophical path. Briefly, a paradigm based on univocal monism and a paradigm based on analogical relationality are at stake, as I hope to make clear throughout the exposition.

1. Criticizing anthropocentric humanism

In Chapter III of *Laudato si'* (=LS), Pope Francis directly and explicitly addresses the question posed here, albeit with a significant qualification of the problematic anthropocentrism of modernity, which he calls technocratic anthropocentrism: "Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds" (LS 116).

This critique of anthropocentrism takes radical contours in certain philosophical and cultural quarters. By way of example, I assume here two perspectives that seem representative to me. Both are influenced by the so-called French post-structuralism,

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[1] Cf. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologias do Sul* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2018).

mainly due to the impact of Gilles Deleuze's work and its transformation of Spinoza's tendentially monistic philosophy. I will start with a position that is explicitly monist and vitalist, articulated by Rosi Braidotti; then I will approach Bruno Latour's proposal, also with monist tendencies, but with a different and challenging configuration.

a) Monist Posthumanism

Rosi Braidotti, in her book *The Posthuman*[2], assumes as her main project the development of a critical post-humanism, proposing to rethink the question of human subjectivity. It is considered post-humanism because it intends to overcome all humanism based on a paradigm of the human subject as dominator and owner, according to the model of modern rationality, markedly masculine, European, and white. This relates critical posthumanism to feminist and postcolonial (or decolonial) discourse, beyond its framing in the ecological question. The way to overcome this anthropocentric paradigm passes through the insertion of the human in the flow of relationships with the non-human living, with the Earth and with the machine, realizing there not only a negative common condition that makes their existence vulnerable, but above all the positive demand of a common task.

However, the most comprehensive philosophical basis of this model of posthumanism is a monistic understanding of reality, explicitly situated in Spinoza's tradition, above all mediated by Gilles Deleuze's reading of him. According to this perspective, differences or processes of differentiation are ascribed to the respective position of entities in the continuous flow of reality, from an "impersonal and pre-individual transcendental univocal field"[3], as "theatre of all metamorphosis"[4], which does not allow us to assume the difference, interpersonal or not, as an expression of a non-appropriable otherness.

This monistic reading is based on the undifferentiated category of life: "'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 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

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[2] Cf. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: PUF, 1969), 124.
[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 310.

stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories, and domains."[5]

It is true that Braidotti insistently reaffirms that she intends to go beyond biotechnological and biopolitical capitalism, insofar as she seeks an adequate understanding of human subjectivity; that she also intends to overcome the typical individualism of the modern perspective, insofar as she proposes an interpretation of the human based on relationality, as a critique of liberal autonomy; and that she intends to avoid the virtual reduction of the human, as certain transhumanisms do, insofar as she affirms the unavoidable character of corporeity and materiality. In its explicit formulation, critical posthumanism asserts its "...distance from both the humanistic assumptions of the universal value of the unitary subject and the extreme forms of science-driven post-humanism which dismiss the need for a subject altogether. One needs at least *some* subject position: this need not be either unitary or exclusively anthropocentric, but it must be the site for political and ethical accountability, for collective imaginaries and shared aspirations"[6].

This zoocentric subjectivity would correspond to a post-anthropocentric way of understanding the human, precisely through its complex relationship with the animal, the Earth and the (digital) machine. But this relationship is articulated in the monistic continuum that unifies all these dimensions of reality. As Braidotti says: "In my view, there is a direct connection between monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity"[7].

Although this perspective has a clearly defined historical framework, placing it in the critical deconstruction of modern humanism, as a model increasingly understood as problematic at various levels, the result of the process is deeper, reaching the very understanding of the human, in the profound alteration of a certain anthropological and even ontological tradition, as an understanding of the being of reality. Still in Braidotti's words, "The posthuman dimension of post-anthropocentrism can consequently be seen as a deconstructive move. What it deconstructs is species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, *Anthropos* and *bios*, as categorically

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[5] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 60.
[6] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 102.
[7] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 57.

distinct from the life of animals and non-humans, or *zoe*. What comes to the fore instead is a nature–culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self…"[8].

It is precisely in dealing with the problematic distinction between nature and culture, especially in its anthropological dimension, that Bruno Latour works his proposal to face the same problem: the exaggerated anthropocentrism of Western culture, especially in its modern version.

b) Symmetric Anthropology

In his well-known essay on symmetrical anthropology, Latour proposes to overcome the nature-culture, or science-society dualism, precisely because he considers that it constitutes the basis of the asymmetric anthropology sought by modernity. At the same time, he relates these dualisms to the fundamental dualism between subject and object, being subject exclusively the human and the rest of reality being taken as an object. Of course, he recognizes that modernity is not marked only by this profile, and therefore admits that we have never been completely modern. But, in a way, this profile is what most strongly characterizes modernity, and certainly also what had the most impact on the way of relationship between humans and non-humans. In his own words: "The hypothesis of this essay is that the word 'modern' designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by 'translation', creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by 'purification', creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other".[9]

What most typically characterizes modernity and its most problematic effects, is the place occupied there by the practice of "purification", through a critical work that completely separates humans from non-humans. To this separation corresponds, from an epistemological point of view, the distinction between subject and object, as well as the separation between the social world and the natural world. The first would be the world of subjects or citizens, the realm of freedom, according to the model of social rationality, concentrated in the concept of *culture*; the second would be the world of inert objects, the realm of necessity, according to the model of scientific and mathematical rationality,

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[8] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 65.

[9] Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais eté modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 20.

concentrated on the concept of *nature*. In fact, it is this separation that truly qualifies modernity. "The dualism nature/society is indispensable to the moderns..."[10]

In a more recent work[11], Latour applies his review of modernity to the ecological issue, focusing on overcoming the dualism between humans and non-humans, between culture and nature. His proposal goes in the direction of a "reanimation" of nature, as an overcoming of the corresponding process of "dis-animation", provoked precisely by the binary separation between humans and objects, between culture and nature. If the modern paradigm led to the conception of non-human nature as a set of inert objects, the overcoming of this paradigm will require an understanding of reality – which focuses on the concept of Earth or Gaia, according to Latour's nomenclature – outside the binary opposition between animate beings (human culture) and inanimate beings (non-human nature). To counteract the modern "dis-animation" of nature, Latour proposes an interpretation of reality as a network of interactions, whose agents are all considered *agencies* – translated into the French as "puissances d'agir"[12], – regardless of whether they are human or not. This would mean that the eventual legitimacy of the distinction between the human world and the non-human world is related to something secondary, in relation to a more fundamental identity, which unites one and the other. "When we claim that there is, on one side, a natural world and, on the other, a human world, we are simply proposing to say, after the fact, that an arbitrary portion of the actors will be *stripped of all action* and that another portion, equally arbitrary, will be *endowed with souls* (or consciousness). But these two secondary operations leave perfectly intact the only interesting phenomenon: the exchange of forms of action through the transactions between agencies of multiple origins and forms at the core of the metamorphic zones."[13]

The fact that Latour admits that this conception has a Spinozist origin[14], on the one hand, and the fact that it is part of a program of re-animation of nature – whose distinctive concept itself ceases to make sense – for the recovery of a complex and multiple relationship between equally "animated" actors, allows us to bring this perspective closer to what could be called animistic monism. Not denying the distinction between the different agencies, this conception would be rooted in a fundamental identity

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[10] Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais eté modernes*, 62.
[11] Bruno Latour, *Face a Gaïa. Huit conferences sur le nouveau régime climatique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015)
[12] Latour, *Face a Gaïa*, 67.
[13] Latour, *Face a Gaïa*, 80.
[14] Latour, *Face a Gaïa*, 67, nota 18.

– therefore monist – of all these agencies, an identity based on the same animic status of all of them – therefore animist.

It is true that putting the question in these terms does not fully correspond to Latour's perspective. And this essentially for two reasons: first, because, throughout his work, the author insists that what he intends with the idea of Earth, as a set of agencies, is not the recovery of a closed and uniform totality, a concept that could coincide with the monist idea of a fundamental equality of everything; secondly, because, although he recovers the mythical figure of Gaïa, none of his intentions seek a kind of divinization of the Earth, based on a global pantheistic animism. Rather, it is a "profane" figure of nature, understood as a network of relationships between the various agents, not as a spherical totality[15], which would assume the characteristics of a metaphysical totality, as a substitute for God, or as another name for the divine. "Agents act! We can try to 'overanimate' them or on the contrary to 'deanimate' them: they will stubbornly remain agents".[16]

However, although Latour does not intend to understand reality as a closed totality or as something governed by an external deity, but only interprets everything within the same interactive process, the background perspective does not seem to be able to abandon the fundamental monism, even if it is absolutely immanent, in the sense of Deleuze[17].

2. Towards an analogical humanism

Pope Francis, realizing the problems of a technocratic anthropocentrism, does not consider it possible to abandon the anthropological reference as essential. "A misguided anthropocentrism need not necessarily yield to 'biocentrism'... Human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognized and valued". (LS 118).

It is clear, therefore, to what extent a geocentric, zoocentric monistic understanding does not allow us to think about the place of the human and its specific responsibility in the context of the challenges that are posed, precisely, to humanity. In this sense, the radically post-humanist post-anthropocentrism does not seem to be the

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[15] Latour debates, in this context, a spherological understanding of reality (Cf. Latour, *Face a Gaïa*, 162ss); Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären*, I-III (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1998-2004).

[16] Latour, *Face a Gaïa*, 225.

[17] As a more explicit formulation of a monist perspective, in a sense close to the one considered here, we can see Emanuele Coccia, *Métamorphoses* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2020).

right way to a significant transformation of the human relationship with the set of planetary agencies – including, currently, digital agencies. The idea of a new humanism takes on precisely this challenge. It needs, however, to be a humanism capable of reviewing and even deconstructing existing humanisms, especially modern humanisms based on the asymmetrical, dominating and technocratic paradigm. In the sense of what has been discussed so far, I propose the idea of a post-anthropocentric – eventually humanist – anthropology, based on the categories of vulnerability and responsibility, as fundamental constituents of human subjectivity in the diversified range of its relationships to the earth, to the living, to digital machines, and to other humans. The "ontological" basis of this anthropology would be an analogical understanding of reality, which avoids the extremes of an equivocal and dialectical understanding, originating binary dualisms, and a univocal understanding, originating a monism that does not allow true alterity and relationship.

In addition to the classic reflection on the concept of analogy[18], based on a dynamic of relational difference, Philippe Descola's proposal can help us to explain what is intended with this analogical paradigm[19]. Based on an analysis of different cultural/natural spaces, he suggests that the ontological and hermeneutic paradigms for the interpretation of reality are organized into three models: the naturalist one; the animist one; the totemic one and the analogical one, based on gradual relational distinctions, whether in the physical dimension or in the relational dimension or in the scope of subjectivity, which puts real alterities in relation at a universal level: "terms and relations are interdependent at the level of the general system".

If we add to this proposal the fundamental classical idea that, in the paradigm of analogy, all entities are truly different from each other, as individuals – which allows the constitution of a true otherness between them, never reducible to a fundamental monism that annuls its alterity – and, at the same time, differences are constituted relationally and not from each isolated individual, then we can speak of a relational anthropology because it is analogical, without the need to reduce it to the monism of a continuum, whether vital, geological or even spiritual. In fact, in the context of monism, the differences would only be apparent, which means that they would not allow a true relationship, but only a vital, energetic, informational, or spiritual flow, only apparently relational.

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[18] See the classic work Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962).

[19] Cf. Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

Based on this analogical paradigm – which is at the same time critical of an asymmetrical modern anthropocentrism – we can then think of a post-anthropocentric humanism, based on the category of human responsibility for the other human beings and even for the non-human, above all due to the vulnerability that qualifies every human being and even all reality. The awareness of one's own vulnerability would thus prevent the subject's absolute claim to power over the object, even relativizing this distinction; at the same time, the concrete and incarnated perception of the vulnerability of the other, human and non-human, places each human before a demand of care that founds its subjectivity as responsibility. The "infinite wound"[20] that constitutes us is, therefore, fundamental for the understanding of the human and for the orientation of its action. Because we are wounded beings and because we face other wounded beings, we have our own responsibility for the world. If it is true that we share with the rest of the world the wounds that mark the planet, it is also true that this gives us a specific task, a kind of "election".

But this election does not give us a privileged place, in the sense of legitimizing our power of unlimited appropriation of everything else. In the contrary, this election calls us to respect, in freedom, everything else, taking care of its infinite wound. This proposal is very similar to the way how Emmanuel Lévinas interprets the constitution of subjectivity, which he explicitly calls "humanism of the other man"[21]. Its core is also the category of vulnerability, which leads to the ethical dynamics of responsibility as the beginning of freedom, where the anthropological difference is situated. In relation to Levinas, we could only add, without denying the special place given to human vulnerability – and which implies not forgetting, in the debate on humanism, the properly inter-human relations or the sociopolitical dimension[22] – that the new humanism, being a humanism of responsibility for the vulnerable other, does not understand this other exclusively as human.

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[20] Cf. Josep Maria Esquirol, *Humano, más humano*. *Uma antropologia de la herida infinita* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2021), 61ss.

[21] Emmanuel Lévinas, *L'humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1972), Cap. 2.

[22] Cf. "Nor must the critique of a misguided anthropocentrism underestimate the importance of interpersonal relations" (LS 119).