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Antiquities beyond Humanism. Edited by EMANUELA BIANCHI – SARA BRILL – BROOKE HOLMES. Classics in Theory. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019. ISBN 978-0-19-880567-0. 310 pp. GBP 70.

The objective of the collected volume, *Antiquities beyond Humanism*, is indicated in its title. On one hand, the collection of essays turns to Greco-Roman antiquity through the lens of the recent theoretical movements loosely gathered under the flag 'posthumanism.' On the other hand, the book aims to locate anti- or ante-humanist discourses in antiquity. For, as the editors remark in their thought-provoking *Introduction*, the Western humanist tradition has an intimate relationship with Greco-Roman antiquity, perceiving it as the home of the classical ideal of (hu)man. However, as this book aims to show, antiquity can also provide alternative narratives that resist this interpretation and challenge humanism from the past.

As noted in the Introduction, much work in dismembering the myth of ancient humanism has already been conducted in the field of classical studies, from Nietzsche to Dodds' *Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), and the works of Vernant, Vidal-Naquet, Detienne, and Loraux. The approach of this book, however, differs from the previous studies in that it does not focus on the imperfections in the humanist ideal of the rational man. Rather, turning away from the human to animals, *daemons*, the cosmos, and other manifestations of life, the texts pay attention to ancient discourses that seem to challenge and disrupt the human on the level of *species*. What makes this collection an intriguing read is that its aim is not to deconstruct the anthropocentrism embedded in ancient thought, but to offer creative and productive readings of ancient texts that in themselves seem to challenge, distort, and queer modern western assumptions about the human and the world.

However, because the theories that count as posthumanist are so diverse and discordant (the essays bring in continental philosophy all-stars from Spinoza and Hölderlin to Bergson, Freud, Heidegger, Arendt, Barthes, Deleuze, Foucault, Irigaray, Butler, Grosz, and Meillassoux) the collection seems somewhat incoherent. There is, then, a danger that the term 'posthuman' becomes merely a fashionable buzzword without any special interpretive weight.

The collection shares its theoretical framework with two recent publications, Melissa Mueller and Mario Telós (eds.), *Materialities of Greek Tragedy* (2018), and Abraham Greenstine and Ryan Johnson's (eds.), *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Metaphysics* (2017).

Five essays stand out as the highlights of the collection. The first highlight is the opening essay of the collection, Adriana Cavarero's "The human reconceived: Back to Socrates with Arendt," in which Cavarero diagnoses a need to rethink the human after the horrors of the Holocaust. Cavarero argues that the goal of the concentration camps was to annihilate human spontaneity and plurality, thus producing 'posthuman' subjects. The essay is a surprising start for a collection that has evoked posthumanism as a creative tool of thought since Cavarero does not see the posthuman as "a category

of critical thought” but as “a material outcome of totalitarianism.” Cavarero holds that the possibility of the destruction of the humanist subject is inscribed in the tradition that gave rise to it in the first place, that is, embedded in the platonic idea of a metaphysical individual. Nevertheless, Cavarero also maintains that in Plato’s Socrates and his *daimonion* we could find a more promising way of conceptualizing humanity and politics in a way that respects what Hannah Arendt calls ‘human plurality.’

The second highlight is Miriam Leonard’s complex and fascinating paper “Precarious life,” which turns to Greek tragedy with Freud and Lacan to think about a premodern concept of life that would not play into the discourses of shared humanity – since it is not our humanity, Leonard suggests, that gives us a connection to the Greeks. Leonard argues that Greek tragedy stages expressions of death drive first conceived by Freud and later diagnosed in *Oedipus at Colonus* by Lacan. Leonard reads the death of Oedipus as a metaphor for the experience of entering language, which is always a foreign “speech that comes from elsewhere” and proposes that we could see the Greek tragedy as this kind of speech that comes from elsewhere but whose language is not necessarily *human*.

Third, Sara Brill’s intriguing essay approaches Aristotle’s *Politics* as a fundamentally *zoological* text. Brill argues that in Aristotle the human language makes the shared life of humans an intensification of, rather than a breach from, animal communality. Thus, the *polis* can be understood as the *topos* or habitat of the human animal, which shapes its inhabitants and their way of life, *bios*, (as water is the *topos* of fish and determinates their *bios*), but which is correspondingly *shaped* by its inhabitants with their *logos*. Human communality, Brill concludes, is special because, in actively shaping their habitat and their way of life with their *logos*, humans are particularly *vulnerable* to political pathologies.

Fourth, Emanuela Bianchi’s paper “Nature trouble” is an ambitious attempt to show that the ancient notion of nature, *physis*, is performative, excessive, and queer. Bianchi makes the argument by combining Judith Butler’s theory of performativity with Elizabeth Grosz’s non-dual account of materiality and Heidegger’s remarks on the phenomenality of the ancient *physis*. Consequently, Bianchi’s argument is based more on the readings of contemporary theorists than on the analysis of ancient texts themselves (Homer, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Aristotle’s *Physics* are mentioned). Even in its overreach, Bianchi’s essay is perhaps the one that comes closest to fulfilling the objective of thinking about non-human (meta)physics.

The fifth notable essay is Brooke Holmes’ paper on the Stoic notion of sympathy. Through a detailed argument and careful reading of the rare sources, Holmes paints a picture of Stoic understanding of the cosmos or Nature as an immense live being, which is made out of a multiplicity of different bodies such as planets, mouse livers and souls. Both vulnerable and vital, the cosmos is permeated by incorporeal sympathy that connects everything from micro to macro levels. Holmes’ elaborate paper suggests that in Stoic metaphysics we could locate an alternative to materialism or idealism: an incorporeal becoming.

Other interesting offerings include Michael Naas’ beautiful and deconstructive essay on Plato. Starting with a surprising proposition in Plato’s *Laws* that humans are distinguished from other animals by their ability to sing and dance, Naas argues that, for Plato, the human capacity par excellence is to put order into unformed material. However, the condition of ordering, which is the rational man’s ordered speech, *logos*, is itself already haunted by its material condition, the meaning-

less voice, *phonê*, that the rational man shares with children and animals – and thus always borders on the non-human.

Giulia Sissa conducts a careful and well-argued reading of Ovid, noting that the Ovidian cosmos is both posthuman (the human undergoes fluid transformations into animals and plants) and anthropocentric (for it is all about *human* metamorphoses). Focusing on the speech of Pythagoras in book 15, Sissa argues that vegetarianism has a special value in a universe where human flesh takes surprising new, and edible, forms.

James I. Porter studies the possibilities of bringing together contemporary metaphysical trends of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism with different strands of ancient metaphysics – Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Lucretius and Heraclitus are mentioned. The essay is a clearly written paper on a subject that calls for further investigation.

Claudia Barracchi's text "In light of *eros*" suggests a reading of *eros* as a very non-human power that underlies all generation and destruction. Barracchi finds this generative-destructive *eros* at play in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, but also, quite surprisingly, at the heart of Aristotle's unmoving mover. Musing on the idea of androgynous love, which would not include the desire to own and control, Barracchi moves away from philosophy to the love imagined in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

In some of the papers the arguments are unfortunately not fully developed. Although Ramona Naddaf's analysis of the *daimonic* voice within Socrates is appealing, the main argument – that listening to this alien voice makes Socrates a non-human figure by reducing his moral autonomy – is not laid out very convincingly.

Also focusing on voice, Kristin Sampson argues that phonocentrism does not apply to Homer. While the essay maps interesting examples of human, animal, and nature sounds in Homer, it is difficult to see how these examples support the argument that we can find in Homer a model of "corporeality without the body," a mode of corporeality that does not require a fixed bodily entity or a division between body and soul.

In a paper on different conceptions of time, Rebecca Hill takes up a formulation from Aristotle's *Physics* according to which time is "always other" (*aei allo kai allo*), arguing that Aristotle conceives time as difference. Hill suggests that this understanding comes close to Henri Bergson's concept of duration and Luce Irigaray's concept of the interval in that it is not exactly a concept of time but a way of formulating the condition for presence. The paper, however, runs too short for the complex argument.

Mark Payne's essay aims to identify a special relationality or a 'chorality' between humans and other forms of life, which Payne defines as "participating in shared organismic life" and locates in Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, Schiller's *Aesthetics*, and Callimachus' and Theocritus' poetry. The essay, however, is written in dense and undecipherable prose that makes the argument very hard to follow.

The book is recommended reading for anyone interested in contemporary continental philosophy and the ancient world. It includes thought-provoking and surprising, but rather miscellaneous, openings for approaching antiquity from posthuman perspectives. The collection succeeds in showing that ancient texts are blooming with non-human life.