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Chapter 3

Whose Well-Being? Deep-Ecological and Posthuman Perspectives on ‘World Worth Living In’



Rauno Huttunen and Hannu L. T. Heikkinen

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to examine the question of who is meant in this book when defining its mission to pursue ‘living well in a world worth living in for all.’ Who, or which, are ‘all’ in this phrase? The authors provocatively claim that the taken-for-granted starting point for most of the authors of this book seems to be the good life of humans, excluding the well-being of the rest of the community of life. The authors take deep-ecological and more-than-human thinking as their starting point, according to which the well-being of human species is dependent on the well-being of the global web of life. Anthropocentrism is the root cause of the ecological crisis that has befallen humanity and the entire planet. Rooted in the Aristotelian and Marxian tradition of praxis, the authors propose a posthuman interpretation of ‘living well,’ based on a review of deep ecology and posthumanism. This new interpretation of the praxis tradition is called *praxis as planetary wisdom*, defined as human action, aimed at human well-being which is intertwined with planetary well-being, including the well-being of present humans, future humans, and non-human nature. The way to achieve this wisdom is through ‘education for planetary well-being.’

Keywords Posthumanism · New materialisms · Deep ecology · Education for planetary well-being · Recognition · Praxis

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here:
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/25NjvXZrFfbyrXKzueWxpb?si=b397cb804593463e>

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Introduction: Which ‘All’? Who?

The purpose of this book is to explore the questions: ‘What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?’ In this chapter, we are asking who do we actually mean when we say ‘all’? Do we mean only humans, or could we think from a more-than-human perspective? At first glance, elsewhere in the book, the answer looks self-evident: the focus seems to be delimited to the well-being of human individuals and societies. Nevertheless, we want to challenge this approach and take a look from a planetary perspective.

We are encouraged to take this critical perspective by picking up one sentence from Kemmis et al. (2014) that is quoted in Volume 1 of *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All*: ‘[...] what counts as the good life for humankind, individually and collectively, must always be determined anew for *changing times and circumstances*’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 27, Italics added). In our opinion, the most significant of the ‘changing times and circumstances’ against which we have to reconsider the idea of good life is the ecological crisis. This crisis is not just something waiting for us in the distant future. It is currently happening *around* us and *in* us.

The root cause of the ecological crisis is the anthropocentric way of thinking that has prevailed since the early days of Enlightenment humanism. *Homo sapiens* has treated the rest of nature as a store of raw material and energy which has resulted in a wide range of negative impacts on the environment and on humanity as a whole. These impacts include climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, resource depletion as well as social and economic inequality. The instrumental view on nature has to be changed, and education is the key to these changes. As the Finnish philosopher Veli-Matti Värrä (2014, p. 89) has crystallized: ‘*Saving the world is both a political and a pedagogical task. Education must create opportunities to transcend the prevailing way of life and see things differently.*’ To transcend the prevailing way of life and to see things differently, a more-than-human perspective to the concept of good life has to be taken. This perspective is advocated in the concept of *education for planetary well-being* (Aaltonen et al., 2023) which provides a basis for this chapter.

The modern anthropocentric mindset is the source and origin of our unsustainable practices. This way of thinking originated in Cartesian dualism; one of the triggers that started this development was Rene Descartes’ observation that human beings are separate from the world; humans are conscious ‘subjects’ and the world is the ‘object’ of human thought and action. According to Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, 1–34), this formed the basis for the Enlightenment project which has led to the supremacy of instrumental rationality. Enlightenment philosophy started from the assumption that humankind is constantly developing toward the better through rational thinking. The key was to learn to use human reason to emancipate humans from coercive natural forces. In pre-modern times, man was subject to the forces of nature, but along with the modernization and rationalization of societies, the situation turned to the opposite: humans became the masters of nature.

Enlightenment and humanism assume that nature exists for humans. The basic statement of humanism was summed up by applying the ancient philosopher

Protagoras' motto '*homo mensura*': man is the measure of all things. One of the greatest achievements of the Enlightenment project is that the human species has subjugated the forces of nature to its own use with the help of human reason (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). As a consequence, nature only has had an instrumental value; the value of nature has been measured from the perspective of how it increases human wealth and well-being. The '*more-than-human-perspective*' and deep-ecological philosophy take an opposite stand: life on this planet is seen as an absolute value. Nature is not for humans. From this point of view, the concept of a good life does not only cover the life of the human species. The value of life in the entire biosphere is greater than the value of the life of one of its species.

In this chapter, we will introduce some basic ideas of deep ecology and posthumanism to lay the foundations for the concept of planetary well-being. In this way, we propose how the theory of educational praxis, which is fundamentally based on humanism, can be reconciled with perspectives from posthumanist and deep-ecological theories.

Deep Ecology and Posthumanism as the Basis for Well-Being

At a general level, posthumanism refers to the idea that we need to move from a human-centered way of thinking to a nature-centered way of thinking. The expression '*more-than-human perspective*', that has sometimes been used to replace the word posthumanism, emphasizes that posthumanism is not a historical epoch coming after an earlier epoch, but a way of thinking in which people seek to expand their understanding of the world by looking at it from a wider perspective. The expression '*more-than-human perspective*' emphasizes that this way of thinking offers something more; a broader perspective on being human on this planet. According to this interpretation, it does not come after humanism but can be seen as an extension or a more developed version of humanism (Hietalahti, 2022).

The starting point of posthuman thinking is the notion of human which is not determined by its contrast to non-human (Lummaa & Rojola, 2006, 14). Posthumanism wants to overcome the anthropocentrism of traditional humanism. For traditional humanism, human beings are the center of the world, and what is good for humans is the highest absolute value. Traditional humanism, represented by (for example) Pico Della Mirandola, René Descartes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm Humboldt, postulates that only humans have inherent value. This inherent value is linked to human capacity for rational thinking. Rationality '*hyper-separates*' us from other living beings, giving us the right to use other living beings solely as objects (Pulkki et al., 2021). Given that humans are supposed to be unique and exceptional creatures, it is natural to assume that these lords of nature have the right to conquer and take advantage of the rest of nature. This can also be seen to be in line with the theory of natural selection, according to which the species at the top of the food chain takes advantage of everything that is further down the food chain. The human species has taken to the extreme its right to control and use all of nature.

An important step toward posthumanist thinking has been the idea of *deep ecology*, based on the work of the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess. The essential ideas of deep ecology are evident from the eight principles for deep ecology which Naess introduced first in 1984 (Naess, 2005, p. 68):

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Because of the foregoing points, policies must be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present and make possible a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

The discussion about posthumanism was preceded by a discussion about theoretical (philosophical) anti-humanism. Louis Althusser introduced this concept in 1962 when criticizing the Marxist humanism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Soviet ‘socialist humanism’ (Althusser, 1962, 2022). It is called theoretical anti-humanism because Althusser did not want to diminish the inherent value of human life. The anti-humanism that does not value human life can be called nihilistic anti-humanism. Althusser’s notion of theoretical anti-humanism was at least partly inspired by Martin Heidegger’s text *Essay on ‘Humanism’* (Heidegger, 1999). Also, Althusser’s student Michel Foucault adopted the idea of theoretical anti-humanism. Todd May (2013) describes Althusser’s and Foucault’s theoretical anti-humanism as following:

It was a reaction against the privileging of the human perspective, a privileging that placed the human at the center of experience, or gave the human a particular and elevated role to play in shaping the world, or ascribed to the human subject a transparency that allowed it to know itself and determine its future and world according to that knowledge... For Althusser, as for other structuralists, centering analysis on the human mistakenly ascribed a central role to human or perhaps conscious human control. What was required was an analysis that saw the human as product rather than author of the world’s processes. For Foucault, the human was simply a passing historical category, one that, as he announced, ‘would be erased, like a face drawn at the edge of the sea.’

Posthumanism has developed and expanded in many directions, and it does not form a unified school of thought. Posthumanism includes philosophical anti-humanism/metahumanism, cultural posthumanism, transhumanism, some brands of new materialisms, posthuman conditions/posthumanism as a new form of postmodernism, etc. (Ferrando, 2013).

Anti-humanism/metahumanism as a philosophical brand is based on Heidegger's aforementioned *Letter on 'Humanism'* (Heidegger, 1999). del Val and Sorgner (2011) define metahumanism in their manifesto as 'a critique of some of humanism's foundational premises such as the free will, autonomy and superiority of anthropoi due to their rationality.' This definition also describes Martin Heidegger's anti-humanism. Heidegger claims that every humanism remains within the tradition of Western metaphysics, and we need to overcome them both. Traditional humanism presupposes a universal essence for the human being which is *animal rationale*. For Heidegger, there is no such thing. Human beings are thrown into the world without a pre-given essence of any kind (Kakkori & Huttunen, 2012). Michel Foucault (Paden, 1987), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Fox & Alldred, 2013), and Gayatri Spivak (1981) are good representatives of this Heideggerian anti-humanism.

Cultural posthumanism refers to cultural studies which acknowledge the limits of previous anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions. This new brand of posthumanist cultural studies relies on post-anthropocentrism (Ferrando, 2013, p. 29). We can even speak of the non-human turn in cultural studies which means 'decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the non-human, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies' (Grusin, 2015, vii).

Transhumanism refers to humans surpassing their natural abilities with the help of technology, for example with the help of digital aids or genetic technology. An excellent example of this is the book *Homo Deus* by the historian Harari (2016), which has gained great popularity in recent years. In this book, Harari describes the accelerating development of the human species toward more and more god-like forms. Humans improve their abilities and they increasingly become kinds of cyborgs, combining biological and technological abilities. It can be seen that we have already taken steps in this direction with the smartphone technology which works more and more seamlessly with the human mind. Nowadays, a smartphone and an Internet connection seem to be a basic human need, providing a human's cognitive interface with the world even from an early age.

New materialism criticizes postmodernism and radical constructivism in which 'language matters,' 'discourse matters,' and 'culture matters' but 'matter does not matter' (Barad, 2003, p. 801). According to Francesca Ferrando (2013, p. 30), 'new materialisms philosophically arose as a reaction to the representationalist and constructivist radicalizations of late postmodernity, which somehow lost track of the material realm.' We cannot forget the material foundation of humans, animals, plants, and also societies. The well-known postmodern philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2019) speaks about the *posthuman condition* paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre's slogan 'human condition.' Braidotti wants to overcome the Sartrean existential humanism where the human individual and his/her 'existential angst' is the premise. For

Braidotti, the *posthuman condition* means that subjects are simultaneously more-than-human and less-than-human. ‘More than human because of its multi-scalar transformations and technological advances, and less-than-human in its inhumane economic and social polarizations and irreversible environmental devastation. So the question is: who are “we”?’ (Braidotti, 2019, p. 42).

The philosophical roots of posthumanism can already be seen in the deep ecology philosophy introduced in the 1970s, but posthumanism as a concept was only introduced much later around the turn of the millennium. Some of the first signposts of the posthumanist debate are Haraway’s (1991) essay *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* and Hayles’s (1999) book *How We Became Posthuman*, which have greatly influenced the contemporary discussion on posthumanism, especially in terms transhumanism.

Martin Heidegger’s critique on technological thinking has greatly influenced posthuman thinking (Ray, 2014). In his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1977, p. 12) claims: ‘Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.’ The anthropocentric traditional humanism considers technology as a neutral means to achieve predetermined ends (Ray, 2014). Heidegger calls this ‘the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology’ (Heidegger, 1977, p. 5) where technology is human activity with sophisticated human-made tools. Human beings are primary here, because humans have created technological tools, humans control technology, and human beings use technology to harness nature for their own needs. Heidegger, on the contrary, claims that the essence of technology is much more than this and that a human being does not form the center of technology. Technological ‘framing’ of the world (*Ge-stell*) does not put humans as masters of technology (and in the center) but as a servant or part of a machinery of resources (standing reserve, *Bestand*). Thus, humans are not controlling the technology; the opposite is true: technology controls human beings (Ray, 2014; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022).

Of course, some forms of posthuman thinking (i.e. transhumanism) still use traditional instrumental definitions of technology. The advocates of transhumanism think that with the help of nanotechnology, humans can become more than humans and humans can use technology only as a neutral instrument. If this is so, then transhumanism appears to share a naive positive attitude toward technology. Heidegger says we should not be naive. We should both say yes and no to technological and calculative thinking—both heal from *Ge-stell* and at the same time continue living in the technological world (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022). According to Gavin Ray, ‘Heidegger continues to influence posthumanist thinking through his critique of anthropocentrism, analysis of technology, and destruction of the binary logic underpinning metaphysics’ (Ray, 2014, 52).

In many respects, Heidegger’s critique of technology, posthuman thinking, and Arne Naess’s deep ecology carry similar messages. Heidegger’s critique of technology helps us to perceive people, nature and technology in a new posthuman way, in which humans are not ‘hyper-separated’ from other living beings and technology is not a neutral instrument. This is in accordance with Naess’s deep ecology. Yet there are also differences. Posthuman thinking does not believe that nature has an

‘inherent value’ like Naess does. Posthuman thinking might consider that there are no inherent values at all. Nevertheless, Naess and posthuman thinking come to the same conclusion: non-human life forms do not just exist as tools for humans to use. Humans have the right to use ‘fruits of nature’ only to satisfy vital needs.

Given that humans are not the crowns of creation, as traditional humanism thought, we have to give other species space to live as well. To do this, we need to reduce the human population. Also, posthuman thinking agrees that we must stop molesting nature. What we need instead is a symbiotic relationship with nature (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022). For that, we must start an ideological and operational change. We can no longer think that humans are the center of the world and masters of nature.

It is essential to realize that in addition to material needs, humans also have immaterial needs. One of the most important immaterial needs is to be acknowledged and valued as a person; to be recognized in human communities by other humans. According to Taylor (1994), recognition is our ‘vital human need.’ This vital need can be fulfilled without destroying nature. To satisfy this need, we do not need all the material things we consume nowadays but we do need love without conditions, we need our rights as citizens to be recognized, and we need our work to be valued and ‘we need the experience that we are loved’ (Honneth, 1996). Satisfaction of all these vital needs can be done in a sustainable way, but new forms of posthuman and ecological thinking and acting are needed.

Toward Praxis as Planetary Wisdom

One of the key aims of this book is to enhance the conceptualization of well-being, social justice, and sustainability in terms of practice theory. Ideas of well-being (‘living well’) and sustainability (‘world worth living in’) are embedded in the philosophical foundation of this book, understood through a social justice lens (‘for all’), and through mirroring these concepts in the classical concept of praxis. The essential question is how to enact praxis in a posthuman world; i.e. how to transform our social practices to be ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally sustainable.

In this article, we do not support nihilistic anti-humanism, and we are also wary of transhumanism, which aims to improve people with the help of technology, but we suggest that posthuman thinking should be taken into account. A world worth living in for humans is a world worth living in and also for other species in the whole biosphere. Humans are not separate beings from nature; they are products of nature, so the well-being of our species, *Homo sapiens*, is intertwined with the well-being of the rest of nature. This is what the deep-ecological ecophilosophy and the ‘more-than-human perspective’ are about. A deep-ecological ecophilosophical perspective implies that social justice between people also means a fair sharing of the burden of ecological reconstruction among different groups of people. We must acknowledge the tensions between the humans who occupy different parts of the planet, and live in different societies and under very different (natural and social) circumstances.

We must also recognize the tensions between present humans, future humans, and non-human nature in terms of well-being (JYU. Wisdom Community, 2021).

Existing practice theories have shortcomings related to their inherent humanistic and anthropocentric normative orientation. To address this shortcoming, we suggest that the idea of a ‘world worth living in’ should be broadened toward *planetary well-being*, which means ‘a state where the integrity of Earth system and ecosystem processes remain unimpaired to a degree that species and populations can persist to the future and organisms have the opportunity to achieve well-being’ (JYU. Wisdom Community, 2021; Aaltonen et al., 2023). This shifts the focal point from the well-being of humans to the Earth system and ecosystem processes that underlie all well-being.

On this basis, we suggest a new interpretation for the concept of praxis. According to the Aristotelian tradition, praxis involves the morally committed and oriented action of the individual practitioners, informed by practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and by the traditions of a field (e.g. Kemmis & Smith, 2008, 4) which aims at promoting happiness (*eudaimonia*) and the good life for humankind. The Marxian interpretation of *praxis* emphasizes the ‘history-making action’ of social groups in societies—action that has moral, social, and political consequences; it helps to shape social formations and conditions for collectivities of people to enable active political action to create better and more just practices (e.g. Kemmis, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014, 26).

Rooted in this Aristotelian and Marxian tradition of praxis, we propose a posthuman interpretation of praxis, based on the review of the deep ecology and more-than-human perspective outlined above: *praxis as planetary wisdom* which can be enabled and promoted by *education for planetary well-being as praxis*. This is to conceptualize praxis as deliberative human action, aimed at human well-being which is intertwined with planetary well-being, including the well-being of present humans, future humans, and non-human nature.

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