

Lacking a homunculus

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human I*, trans. Gary Handwerk, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997. 396 pp., £60.50 hb., £24.95 pb., 978 0 80472 665 8 hb., 978 0 80474 171 2 pb.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1878–Fall 1879)*, trans. Gary Handwerk, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2012. 648 pp., £54.95 hb., £18.95 pb., 978 0 80472 875 1 hb., 978 0 80478 393 4 pb.

Near the end of 2012, a UK-based production company calling itself the Planetary Collective released a short film online called *The Overview Effect*. The film features stunning footage of the Earth from outer space, interspersed with interviews with astronauts, scientists and philosophers. The upshot of the film is that the view of the Earth from space produces a shift in consciousness – the ‘overview effect’ – that entails a realization that we as human beings are not separate from the planet on which we live. The general message of the film is that of sublime wonder and unity: national boundaries disappear, and over its surface the planet reveals strange, luminous patterns of colour, cloud and light (otherwise known as cities, smog and the electrical grid).

The Overview Effect was immensely popular upon its initial release. But its ‘we are the world’ message of planetary unity tends to gloss over a dubious strategy frequently used by humanist thinking: that it is we as human beings who have the self-ordained privilege of the overview effect, and it is through such feats of technology that human beings will once again establish mastery over the planet – with which we are ‘one’ only when it benefits us as human beings. However, in its appeal for a planetary consciousness, *The Overview Effect* tends, in fact, to reveal something different: the indifference of the planet vis-à-vis our repeated attempts to render it meaningful. It is in this context that one is reminded of Nietzsche’s famous passage from ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of 'world history' – yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.

Here Nietzsche gives us an 'overview effect' quite different from the film. In this version, we have never been one with the planet, and neither does the planet require our cleverness and technical ingenuity to save it – from ourselves. Nietzsche's capacity for undermining the human is perhaps needed now more than ever. On the one hand, we who are still on the Earth's surface cannot escape an awareness of the impact of climate change, beset as we are by disasters that increasingly refuse the distinction between the natural and human-made. On the other hand, the process of recuperating the planet for us as human beings continues unabated. Whether we can 'save' the planet is one question – whether the planet needs saving is another.

Nietzsche encapsulated this dilemma in the title of his third published book: *Human, All Too Human*. The entirety of *Human, All Too Human*, along with Nietzsche's notebook writings of the period, are now available in two volumes, in a new edition published by Stanford University Press. Surprisingly, there has never previously been a complete critical English edition of *Human, All Too Human*, much less of Nietzsche's complete works. In the 1990s, Stanford addressed this gap and began a project to publish 'The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche'. The series was to be based on the definitive edition of Nietzsche's works: the edition of Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari begun in the 1960s and numbering some fifty volumes in all, including lectures, unpublished manuscripts and notebooks. In the 1980s a project began to make available a more accessible, fifteen-volume 'student edition' and it is on this that the Stanford Complete Works is based. Now under the editorial leadership of Alan Schrift and Duncan Large, the project was on hiatus for some time, and has only recently been resumed. Both volumes of *Human, All Too Human*, translated and annotated by Gary Handwerk, are a welcome addition to Nietzsche studies. Steering away from some of the liberties taken by Walter Kaufmann, and distancing himself from the rigidities of R.J. Hollingdale, Handwerk's translation is able to capture in a more nuanced way the polyphony of voices in Nietzsche's writing – by turns sarcastic, enthusiastic, naive, spiteful, meditative, joyful.

This edition is also welcome because, as a book, *Human, All Too Human* is often under-represented

in Nietzsche scholarship. *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals* are frequently taught in the classroom, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* frequently cited for its literary merits, and late works such as *The Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo* read for their iconoclasm. A close look at *Human, All Too Human* not only shows that many of Nietzsche's later concepts were already present there in nascent form, but also brings much of the later work back into the broader issue of the problem of the human being. Many claims have been made for Nietzsche by later generations – a nihilist Nietzsche, an existential Nietzsche, a political Nietzsche, a feminist Nietzsche, a quantum Nietzsche, even a cyber-Nietzsche. A proposition, then: if there is a Nietzsche for our twenty-first century of planetary disaster, extinction and the 'posthuman,' it resides not in his later work but in the two volumes of *Human, All Too Human*.

For example, in the second volume Nietzsche gives us another, much more sardonic, variant on the overview effect:

There would have to be creatures of more spirit than human beings, simply in order to savor the humor that lies in humans seeing themselves as the purpose of the whole existing world and in humanity being seriously satisfied only with the prospect of a world-mission. If a god did create the world, he created humans as *god's apes*, as a continual cause for amusement in his all-too-lengthy eternity. ... Our uniqueness in the world! alas, it is too improbable a thing! The astronomers, who sometimes really are granted a field of vision detached from the earth, intimate that the drop of *life* in the world is without significance for the total character of the immense ocean of becoming and passing away. ... The ant in the forest perhaps imagines just as strongly that it is the goal and purpose for the existence of the forest when we in our imagination tie the downfall of humanity almost involuntarily to the downfall of the earth.

As Nietzsche jibes, the strange endeavour of human thinking tends to eclipse the world, until we become so philosophically solipsistic that even the non-human – by its very name – begins to look at lot like the human. Nietzsche caps off his rant with the following: 'Even the most dispassionate astronomer can himself scarcely feel the earth without life in any other way than as the gleaming and floating gravesite of humanity.'

But Nietzsche's phrase *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* has several senses to it. Certainly it evokes a sense of disappointment – the 'all too human' as less than human, as the failure to live up to the various standards, criteria and values that we associate with being human. And, as Nietzsche repeatedly points out

in his book, this itself has become a hallmark of the human. But the phrase also evokes a more critical sense of failing to challenge our most basic and habitual ways of thinking and living – including the questioning of those same criteria and values that demarcate the human from the non-human. At the same time, Nietzsche's invectives against humanity are outstripped only by his refusal to dispense with the term 'human', much less imagine a romantic, transcendent realm 'beyond' the human. As if presaging his later idea of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche repeatedly *affirms* this notion of the all too human. Human beings are all too human not only because they fail to live up to the human, but because they are specifically human, singularly human, and in an immoral way that refuses both the divine fiat of science as well as the natural history of religion's chosen peoples. As Handwerk notes, human beings are human for Nietzsche because they are 'thoroughly human' – and in this lies their potential to astound, to disappoint, to baffle, to incite curiosity or spite, to wax poetic about wonder and to occupy ourselves with the banality of evil.

Of course, what Nietzsche says about humanity is inseparable from how he says it, and in this regard *Human, All Too Human* is unique among Nietzsche's books. When Nietzsche began writing it in or around 1876, many changes were afoot – he not only broke from Wagner and his circle, but the 32-year-old

philologist was forced to retire from his teaching post at the University of Basel due to a series of health problems, which included stomach problems, joint pain, migraines, nausea and vomiting, and rapidly deteriorating eyesight. Deciding to relocate to a better climate, he travelled to Sorrento, where he wrote the bulk of the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*. 1878 saw the publication of *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, comprising some 600 aphorisms. According to Hollingdale, of the 1,000 copies printed, only 120 sold – the remainders were rebound together with the second volume for the 1886 edition. (In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche himself recounts how, upon publication, he sent two copies to Wagner, from whom he had definitively separated, and by coincidence Wagner had at the same time sent him a copy of *Parsifal*. Nietzsche describes the coincidence as a moment of dissonance, 'as if two swords had crossed'.) The following year another 400 aphorisms were published with the title *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, and the year after that another 350 aphorisms with the title *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. Writing in *Ecce Homo* some twelve years after its initial publication, Nietzsche would characterize the book as 'the monument of a crisis' and a 'spiritual cure'.

The change in lifestyle was echoed in Nietzsche's writing style as well. While in Sorrento, Nietzsche began writing in the brief, aphoristic style that would



characterize some of his best-known works. But Nietzsche's aphorisms are not of a single mould, and his turn to the short form manifests itself in different ways, from mini-essays in the vein of Montaigne to taut maxims reminiscent of La Rochefoucauld. We also get dialogues, parables, poetry, even jokes. Indeed, *Human, All Too Human* reflects Nietzsche's experiment not only with style, but with reading as well. One anecdote has Nietzsche reading La Rochefoucauld's *Sentences et maximes* on the train to Sorrento, but Nietzsche himself gives the biblio-detective in us a number of clues: in addition to scholarly works on Greek tragedy and philology, Nietzsche was reading Chamfort, Lichtenberg, Montaigne, Pascal, Vauvenargues, Voltaire (the dedicatee of the first edition of *Human, All Too Human*), and of course Schopenhauer, ever Nietzsche's 'educator' and paragon of misanthropic aphorisms.

One of the great advantages of the Stanford edition is the inclusion of a scholarly and annotated presentation of Nietzsche's notebook writings that correspond to his published works. In the case of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche's notebooks not only provide a fascinating glimpse into his production process, but also contain gems that jump out of the page. For instance, an entry from the fall of 1878 simply reads: 'A novel. A volume of poetry. A history. A philology.' An entry from the summer of 1879, perhaps during a bout of illness, reads: 'All I lack is a homunculus.' Another note, from the fall of 1879, reads: 'I am thinking of having a long sleep.' Nietzsche puts the phrase itself in quotes, but does not give a reference.

Human, All Too Human is a masterclass in the short form, an exegesis on the virtues of the 'incomplete thought', as prescient today in our era of the 'overview effect' as it was in Nietzsche's era of Darwinism, industrialization and spiritualism. It is no accident that such experiments in the incomplete thought take as their subject the problem of the human. Above all, the phrase 'human, all too human' signals the beginning of a trajectory that would reach across all of Nietzsche's writings, and would continue into the rediscovery of his work by generations of twentieth-century philosophers and theorists. Handwerk concisely summarizes this trajectory in his Afterword to the second volume: 'Human beings, these aphorisms and mini-essays continue to remind us, are only human, and we would be far better off shaking our recurrent illusion that we are divine, along with the equally recurrent illusion that we are simply bestial.' Were Nietzsche writing today – doubtless working as a part-time adjunct instructor teaching online courses from home – he might very

well regard the flora and fauna of contemporary theory, from nonhuman *actants* to posthumanism to objects and hyperobjects, as so many varieties of this impulse to redeem the human, through the back door, the side door, a trap door... The so-called 'overview effect' can, however, be presented in a different way: the condition of the human as its inability to decondition itself, the horizon of the non-human reflected back as the 'gleaming and floating gravesite of humanity'.

Eugene Thacker

Tied to life

Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck, eds, *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2012. 244 pp., £55.00 hb., 978 0 23011 831 7.

The trope of feminist 'daughters' has been subject to much criticism of late, for conflating the wide range of feminist relationships into a mother–daughter dyad, and for promoting a vision of feminism as a singular journey, where goals and concepts are passed down to the latest generation, who continue or finish off what their feminist great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers began. In spite of such criticism, the editors of this collection have elected to retain the daughter trope, though they attempt to refigure daughterliness in an 'undutiful', transgressive mode. To be 'undutiful' is presented here as a 'productive form of conceptual disobedience', which resists singular, unilinear models of feminism and highlights 'the multiplicity of voices and agendas that are necessarily integral to feminist thought and practice'.

Given this stated aim to foster undutiful criticality and represent a diverse range of approaches and perspectives, it is unfortunate, then, that the preface and opening chapter – written by Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, respectively – both equate the mindset of undutifulness, and the future of feminism, with one theoretical framework: a Deleuzian posthumanism. In her preface, Braidotti states unequivocally that becoming undutiful means 'becoming nomadic', and above all posthuman: 'All closeted anthropocentric feminists need to come out at this point and express their dutiful adherence to their own species supremacy. The others can move on and run with the she-wolves of nomadic becoming'. Grosz's opening chapter similarly sets up a Deleuzian posthumanism as the (only) way forward