

DeFalco, A. (2023). *Curious kin in fictions of posthuman care*. Oxford University Press.

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The crisis arising from climate change poses imminent threats to marginalised human and nonhuman populations, necessitating a concerted effort to formulate comprehensive solutions. The primary reason for climate change is humans' rampant exploitation of natural resources through extractivism. The hubris of human exceptionalism allowed humans to continue this attitude of total disregard (Braidotti 2013, Ferrando 2020, Jensen and Auld 2022). In order to understand the flaws of human exceptionalism, it is imperative to comprehend prevailing notions of the human and how they create exclusionary boundaries. Posthumanism helps to realise the full potential of the decentering of the human as the measure of everything (Herbrechter 2013, Ferrando 2013, Ferrando 2020). It is a call for action to radically redefine the monolithic concept of humanism that emerged during the Enlightenment period in Europe (Braidotti 2013, Ferrando 2020). This radical redefining of the human is only possible by discarding the colonial definition of the human that thrives on binaries (human/inhuman, white/black), strengthening the structures of oppression. In this regard, care becomes pertinent to forming new relationalities and kinships among human, nonhuman, and more-than-human actors.

Amelia DeFalco's *Curious Kin in Fictions of Posthuman Care* (2023) adds weight to the existing scholarship on posthuman care. Rather than being a completely philosophical or theoretical take on care, the author analyses selected short stories, novels, and films to provide new perspectives on the ethics of posthuman care. The author's objective in the book is "to propose a dynamic model of care that addresses all creatures, human and more-than-human, as mutually constituting, vulnerable, embodied, and embedded beings" (21). DeFalco's care model extensively incorporates indigenous ontologies and perspectives from critical race studies, which advocate for dismantling the Western liberal concept of humanism that promotes human hierarchy. In order to achieve this goal, she adopts a unique methodology, which she calls "walking with" (169). The purpose of this methodology is to think with the various critical, ontological, and philosophical traditions and suggest innovative models that increase the possibilities of posthuman care. DeFalco is careful not to permanently adopt and prescribe any particular solution as she is aware of the unique care requirements of agents embedded in varied social and ecological realities.

The name of the book serves an essential purpose as a signpost for critical and philosophical transitions necessary for arriving at posthuman care. The terms *curious* and *kin* bring together the urgency of posthumanism for inter and intra-species care and affection. The word *curious* represents the radical need for "cross-species relations" (8). On the other hand, *kin* means the "linear etymological roots" (9) that trace the history of relationships to a single family, race, and species.

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This symbolises the philosophy of exclusivity of humanism that only celebrates a certain ideal of humanity that is race, colour, and gender specific. Together, *curious kin* represents the posthuman ideal of care and affection for various types of agents like humans, nonhumans, and more-than-human. This creates room for the flourishing of relationalities that break the pernicious spell of humanism. In consideration of this aspect, this book offers possibilities to redefine kinship in a posthumanist context where relations are not limited to traditional biological connections but can be forged through mutual affinities. DeFalco cites a variety of interdisciplinary publications that upend the status of fungi as self-sufficient organisms that worked as an “oppositional touchstone” for human independence (15). Research by various microbiologists establishes the ecological principle of relation between organisms. This research also places human beings in an embedded network of interdependence of human, nonhuman, and more-than-human factors.

The book is divided into four chapters, where each chapter focuses on a different set of fictional and cinematic texts to point out the possibilities of human-nonhuman affinities and relationalities. The first chapter, “Care Robots and Affective Legitimacy”, examines various debates surrounding human and robot companionship. It highlights the capacity of nonhumans for care and affection to forge “real care relations” (23) while discussing how these narratives are tampered with to fit certain agendas to maintain the human hierarchy. The chapter begins by questioning the status quo of the fundamentals regarding humanism and the physicality of humans. DeFalco shifts the emphasis of posthuman care towards posthuman touch by incorporating the scholarship of Karen Barad, Erin Manning, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Sara Ahmed, Jackie Stacey, and others. The philosophical status of “skin from enclosure or envelope to porous, relational membrane” (97), presents the opportunity for haptic relationality that facilitates the forging of curious kinship.

Chapter two, “Feral Touch: Care and Contact in Posthuman Worlds”, investigates “the haptic dimensions of posthuman care” (23) in various realms—human, nonhuman, and more-than-human. By discussing existing scholarship, DeFalco analyses where the debates and controversies regarding the care philosophy stand when compared with how care functions in the nonhuman and more-than-human dominion. The texts DeFalco studies are *Dog Boy* (2009) by Eva Hornung, *Humanimal* (2009) by Bhanu Kapil, and *Under the Skin* (2000) by Michael Faber. *Dog Boy* reveals how interspecies connections are forged between humans and nonhumans when the vigil of society is dropped. The story of *Dog Boy* brings attention to the ways in which human readers’ materiality reacts to the representation of human-animal tactile relationalities. Similarly, *Humanimal* brings attention to the anthropocentric representation of “posthuman embodied animality” (80). The selected texts in this chapter offer distinctive insights into atypical haptic relationships and underscore the significance of touch in fostering cross-species relations.

The third chapter in the book, “Care and Disposable Bodies,” analyses how care operates among humans and nonhumans situated on the peripheries. This chapter “explores the ethical and political significance of disposable matter” (24). The texts analysed in this chapter are *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro and the *MaddAddam* trilogy by Margaret Atwood. DeFalco highlights the correlation between the perception of waste and the Western capitalist economy by referencing multiple authors in the waste theory. The concepts of waste and usefulness are intricately linked to human colonialism. It endeavours to highlight the consequences of caring and being cared for by disposable bodies or matter. The chapter starts with the example of the robot dogs named Aibo in Japan, who were provided funerals by their owners (101). However, this practice of providing funerals to these nonfunctional robot dogs garnered ridicule from the Western audience, who could not understand the logic of giving funerals to inanimate objects. Drawing attention to these



inanimate and non-living bodies and objects, DeFalco draws parallels between inorganic bodies and disposable bodies in a neoliberal capitalist society.

Chapter four, “Decolonizing Posthuman Care”, dwells on the consequences of care moved out of the closely guarded realm of care philosophy and what it reveals about the philosophy of humanism. DeFalco begins the chapter by mentioning how BLM (Black Lives Matter) reveals the status of Black life as disposable life in a country that promises to provide protection and care to every citizen. Therefore, it becomes imperative to decolonise care from the humanism that feeds the capitalist economy, which deems certain bodies disposable after the act of extraction. The novel *Salvage the Bone* (2011) by Jesmyn Ward offers the exploration of the ideas of posthumous posthuman care that emerges from queer kinship between discarded bodies. DeFalco analyses this realist novel as a critique of humanism and as a vestige of colonialism that produces and thrives on creating ontologically oppositional pairs like human/inhuman (nonhuman), beneficial/disposable and so forth. The interpretation of this novel suggests that engaging in care for the discarded and disposable bodies challenges the established ideologies that facilitate the devaluation of these bodies in the first place. DeFalco ends the chapter by pointing out the fallacy in the new materialist assumption that all human beings have agency. Such a viewpoint undermines the struggles of minority groups who are continuously denied human status “by white supremacist political frameworks” (158).

In the concluding chapter, DeFalco points out the overdependence of Western ontologies on “biological vitality” to determine the deserving recipients of care and exclude those who are not. In the call for posthumous posthuman care, DeFalco suggests a model of care that is no longer reliant on the Anglo-Western concept of “life” that is still heavily influenced by the colonial definition of human. The notion of “Zoe”, signifying “generative vitality”, is better suited to replace “life”, which is informed by the philosophy of humanism. Zoe represents an “endless vitality of life as a continuous becoming” where the “subject is dissolved and regrounded in an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings” (Braidotti, 2006, 41). Regardless of the best efforts of DeFalco, of new materialists, and of posthumanists to decenter the human, the spectre of anthropocentrism appears through representationalism because there is no “objective phenomenology” (Karkulehto et al., 2019, 6). The instances of curious kinships regarding nonhumans and more-than-human agents only become visible with humans and through the human gaze. Therefore, in this regard, it is yet to be seen to what extent the philosophical and ontological vigour of posthumanism/posthumanist care is able to extend rights to nonhumans and more-than-humans.

This book by DeFalco is a timely intervention in the area of posthumanism and the various facets of posthuman care. Although a significant amount of literature exists on posthuman care, it is deficient in supporting evidence from speculative fiction. The appeal of *Curious Kin* revolves around its ability to incorporate a diverse range of real-life and fictional scenarios. It offers a complete philosophical and ontological take on posthuman care, deriving insights from diverse fields of study. Although DeFalco discusses the role of colonialist humanism in the dehumanisation of colonised subjects, she fails to mention the systematic exclusion and berating of the indigenous genealogies that promote human-nonhuman relationalities and affinities. The language used by the author is easy to follow, even while discussing complicated concepts. The author’s claims are rigorously supported by the in-depth study of previously published research. The chapters in the book revolve around the research questions and objectives elaborated by the author in the introduction. As a result of this, the thematic shifts in each chapter seem to follow a logical order.

DeFalco primarily analyses fictional texts, encompassing both textual and cinematic mediums, which are predominantly situated in the Global North and authored by individuals residing in

countries falling within the purview of the Global North. Even the two texts, *Dog Boy* and *Humanimal*, which are located in the global south, are written by authors living in developed nations. Overreliance on such texts ignores the unique form of posthuman kinships and relationalities in developing economies that may result in prioritisation and acceptance of Anglo-European models of posthuman care. Despite the diverse scholarship incorporated in the book, DeFalco's inspiration remains rooted in canonical Euro-American literature. Consultation of Dalit literature and criticism (Kamble 2009, Limbale 2004) would have revealed unique curious kinships formed in the Indian subcontinent and, at the same time, reduced the blind spots in Anglo-European scholarship. Regardless of these shortcomings, *Curious Kin* makes a significant contribution to advancing scholarship in the field of posthuman care.

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