

# The Inhuman (shortened version)

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Last year, I was asked by friends to distill the thesis of the labor of the inhuman in two or three pages. This post is the product of my attempt at capturing the main points. I should add that I have now some critical objections about this piece but that would require a more lengthy post in another occasion:

## Rational Inhumanism

1. Anti-humanism and essentialist humanism are two faces of the same coin. The latter is an inflationary account of the human as defined by an immutable, inviolable structure or essence (biological structure, fixed nature, divine endowment, etc.) and the former is a deflation of that essence (via natural sciences, technology, or metaphysical flattening of the status of the human as just one object among many others). Both anti-humanism and essentialist humanism derive two seemingly distinct conclusions from the same set of premises. It is not that their answer to the problem they are attempting to engage is wrong, but rather the very problem they seek to tackle is a false problem, a *pseudos*.
2. Essentialist humanism (EH) and anti-humanism (AH) can be identified less by their approaches to the problem of what the human is and more by their normative claims about what the human ought to do on the basis of an inflated or deflated account of a human essence: If the human is such-and-such (as defined by recourse to an essence or fixed nature), then the human ought to do X. EH and AH both parasitize rational norms in order to draw conclusions from their premises, while at the same time denying the relevance of norms or reasons in defining the human. Even the slogan 'let it go' is unconsciously a normative recipe of a peculiar kind.
3. Inhumanism defines the human not by recourse to any essence, but solely in terms of its ability to enter the space of reasons—theoretical and practical cognitions—through which the human can determine and revise what it ought to be by constructing and revising the very reasons or norms that it mobilizes to think and transform itself. Reason is a doing, but it is a special kind of doing. And there is no reason for us to think that reasoning cannot be untethered from its biological limitations and reinvented in different forms afforded by information processing systems and computational processes discovered, developed or modeled using reasoning itself.

Inhumanism only distinguishes the human by its normative (rather than causal-structural) invariances. These invariances are the capacities of the human to determine and revise itself using theoretical and practical cognitions. In this sense, inhumanism is the extraction of the normative core of humanism, but the locus of this normativity is neither placed in nature (irrational materialism) nor attributed to the divine (theology). For inhumanism, the locus of this normativity is in the capacity of the human for rational agency—that is, conceptual activities which are rooted in

social linguistic discursive practices (a formal social condition of possibility) and by which humans (qua a biological species) can institute their own collectively instantiated rules (judgments) with regard to what they ought to be and what they ought to do (i.e. sapience qua rational agency which has no *biological* essence). Accordingly, inhumanism should necessarily be understood as an amplification of rational humanism. In disenfranchising the rational-normative core of the human, inhumanism becomes a vector through which the human constructs and revises itself beyond any purported essence or final cause.

4. If what distinguishes the human is its capacity for self-determination and self-revision (i.e. rational agency, becoming the locus of theoretical and practical reasons), then in order for us to maintain the intelligibility of ourselves as humans, we ought to commit to a collective project of self-determination and self-revision (that is, the concept of humanity as such). Without the normative import of the latter, the intelligibility and significance of the human collapses back into precisely those parochial conceptions of humanity that we either seek to abolish or escape from. To overcome essentialist humanism, we cannot simply ignore what makes us human nor can we dismiss the rational status of the human by espousing an anti-humanist or post-humanist position. We ought to work our way through the problem of what it means to be human, and through this very exploration, reconstruct and reshape the human. Intelligence is intrinsically correlated with the intelligible. Expanding the universe of the intelligible and cultivation or re-engineering of intelligence come hand in hand. One cannot have the concept of intelligence without that which is intelligible. A conception of intelligence that has no intelligibility is only a dogma. And one cannot have the intelligible without reasons as minimal constraints of thinking and action. Rational inhumanism—adequately understood—is a necessary recipe for human emancipation, a project that coincides with the liberation of intelligence through the expansion of its intelligibility or in a Sellarsian sense *intelligibilities* (theoretical, practical and axiological).
5. Once we commit to the collective project of self-determination and self-revision (i.e. the project or framework that makes the human qua rational agency intelligible, or what underlines the significance of the human), we confront ourselves with two immediate consequences which follow from our commitment, or what we have committed ourselves to:

5-1. We begin to revise the manifest portrait of the human i.e. what we take ourselves to be or what we appear to ourselves here and now. Committing to humanity is constructing it in accordance with *reasons* (our own *rules* rather than causes or *laws*). There is no mysticism or supernatural component in this enablement by self-imposed constraints. In fact, the best model to think about the Spirit or the rule-following *geistigs* is already at hand, a computer that has a logical autonomy and bootstrapping capabilities, even though its immediate practical autonomy is relative at best and an absolute heteronomy at worst (to use Kant-inspired Sellars's example of a computer booting up and performing operations in "...*this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks...*") Sure, we cannot overstretch this analogy, but that is because our very concept of computation is still young and limited, otherwise virtually there is nothing that cannot be modeled as computational

processes even the human as a *special kind of computational hierarchy* (syntactic and semantic complexity, geistig interaction, epistemic hacks of reality, etc.) But insofar as construction according to rules or reasons (the very definition of autonomy) coincides with emancipation of the human from the limits of a natural essence, a particular cause or a particular transcendental structure, by constructing ourselves in accordance with our own self-correcting rules, we revise the very portrait of the human. But this construction in accordance with our own rules is not tantamount to being blind to natural and causal constraints. Like every construction, it requires us to adequately identify, understand and when possible modify such constraints (again the reference to the Platonic isomorphy or deep correspondance between intelligence and the intelligible). It is just the case that we should no longer take causes or laws as what pre-determine what we ought to be and what we ought to do. In being autonomous, in constructing and revising ourselves, we erase they very picture of the human that we are for so long have been accustomed to. The point is not mere self-discovery, but to *re-engineer the reality of ourselves and thus of our phusis* (craftsmanship of the mind).

5-2. We free the definition and significance of the human from any purported essence or fixed nature. In doing that, the normative appellation 'The Human' becomes a transferable entitlement, a right that can be granted or acquired regardless of any attachment to a specific natural or artificial structure, heritage or proclivity since being human is not merely a right that can only be obtained naturally at birth through biological ancestry or inheritance. The title of the human can be transferred to anything that can graduate into the domain of judgments, anything that satisfies the criteria of rational agency or personhood (namely, rational authority and responsibility), whether an animal or a machine. The entwinement of the project of human emancipation (understood as augmentation of collective autonomy) with the artificial futures of human intelligence is the logical consequence of 'the human as a transferable right'. Just as we become entitled to freedoms by acquiring this right, once we grant something else this right, we ought to recognize their freedoms to do what they think ought to be done. Liberate that which liberates itself from you because anything else is the perpetuation of slavery. Giving rise to that which liberates itself from us is as much an ethical injunction as it is the ramification of maintaining and broadening our autonomy by being rational agents. It is the very definition of being a human.