REMAPPING THE POSTHUMAN AND CULTURAL MUTATIONS

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Abstract: Richard Dawkins claims that the evolution of the human brain has evolved so much that it can now rebel against the selfish gene. The rebellion should be against the anthropocentric humanist tradition and move towards an altruistically entangled posthumanism. It is the selfish gene that makes a species survive and evolve into the contemporary deferring posthuman condition. Passion for technology, artificial intelligence, cybernetics, and other technological fields has brought humankind to such an advanced stage of evolution. Rethinking the selfish "we" has the power to retaliate against the inadequacy of anthropocentrism. A major attempt to achieve inter-human equality is to grant each entity its rights, such as Human Rights and Animal Rights. Sanctioning the "Rights of the Environment," which could function as a lever for climate change. Everyone must accept their current existential status of the Anthropocene as an ethical starting point for unselfish altruism and environmental preservation. However, the selfish gene could be the driving force behind environmental preservation. We argue that, given that the human species is not fully able to eliminate the selfish gene, it must behave altruistically and adopt a posthuman, post-anthropocentric condition.

I. Introduction

The cultural, political, economic, technological, and scientific capital of posthumanism has been widely theorized and debated in the humanities. As long as humans exist, before they are taken over by the machine, this dilemma of the human and its status, position, and function in the universe will continue to haunt humanity as a ghost. Science and technology have so well been fused into the human genome and DNA that functioning without these prosthetics, better known as technological gadgets, synthetic medicine, etc., seems an impossible task. Moreover, their absence creates some sort of void, an absence, a limp, an existential crisis in human existence. Part of the problem is the absence of consideration for the non-human, the living Other as the source of human existence, and rather an inclination, an addiction to the in-human as the source and solution to all human, non-human, and in-human problems. The common denominator in all three is the human quotient, which, if considered independently as the animal or ecological world and the world of science and technology, the human does not fit, and at the same time, the latter could not exist without the human.

In the current Anthropocene era, are humans humans? This question poses two further fundamental questions: first, what and who is the human, and second, why are humans today positioned by some as posthumans? An important point to be observed in the three questions is the common denominator, which is the human quotient, and hence, all three issues remain anthropocentric. A further question is how we define the human, and whether it is essential to do so. The answer is both "yes" and "no." On the one hand, it is essential to define who and what is "human"; on the other, defining the human inevitably puts the human at the centre of humanist discourse, as seen during the Enlightenment.

A distinction has always been made between "human" and "humanity," while fundamentally, the human must be an embodiment of humanity. Defining humanity would essentially be setting a moral and ethical framework by which humans must live, behave, grow, and evolve; in other words, humanity evolves alongside culture, and vice versa. On the other hand, the human includes the natural ingredients of living beings: its biological makeup, genes, physical embodiment, and evolutionary progression; in other words, the human as

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matter and nature. So here arises the dual framework of human nature and culture. Stefan Herbrechter questions: "Is the human in fact human because of its 'nature' or its 'culture'?"

Humans have (d) evolved significantly over the last several million years. From its existence as a being whose sole motive was essentially survival (as seen in the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Ice Ages), survival of its genes as propounded by Richard Dawkins, to another kind of being that is already creating different and innovative means for survival in the era of the Anthropocene.

The aim of the human being, then and now, remains survival, but in a different milieu and a very modified (un)natural environment. What is it that has changed, or rather not changed, that even today, in the humans' extremely advanced stage of evolution, the human species still needs to battle for survival? What is the human battling itself against?

To understand what has changed, we first need to understand the "human condition" and its evolution over the years, which is beyond the scope of our present study. Therefore, we will begin with the period of the Enlightenment or Humanism, during which the question of the human was vigorously questioned, debated, and opposed from a philosophical perspective. In this part, we will also see how the human is defined from a scientific angle, especially through the theorization of Richard Dawkins's notion of evolution and survival. This will take us to the second question we asked in the beginning: what is the posthuman doing in the debate about the human? In the second part, we will investigate the overlap between the posthuman and the Anthropocene. Finally, our third question will be to examine how and why we are positioned today in the era of the Anthropocene.

It is a scientifically and evolutionarily proven fact that non-humans can very well live without humans (intervention), but can we consider the opposite also possible, where humans exist without non-humans, which humans call their "Others"? By becoming posthuman, have we been able to go beyond the anthropocentric character of the human? If not, are we only posthuman because of technological interference, or posthuman because artificial intelligence can interfere with human consciousness, thereby changing the concept of the human? Given the present condition of climate change, or call it global warming or even the 'greenhouse effect," how can humans use their posthumanist powers, such as technology, to counter or stop the process of entropy? Although entropy suggests irreversibility, how can humans at least slow down the process of the Earth's and humanity's end? This is the question we ultimately wish to answer through an understanding of the human in Humanism, posthumanism, and the Anthropocene.

II. The Human in Humanism

Humanism, as the word itself denotes, revolves around the human. A philosophical and critical movement that began in the 17th and 18th centuries, today enters the debate of several "isms." The 18th-century philosophical movement advocates for progress, human freedom, equality, dignity, and human values. Humanists believe that science and reason are the most important tools and that nothing should escape their scrutiny, not even demons, angels, or God. By eliminating God through systematic scrutiny of rationality and with the ultimate power of reason, a human tool to eliminate the existence of God, the human has placed itself at the centre of this discourse. It has willfully forgotten the necessity of the non-human as the essence of the human and, at the same time, has neglected the in-human, such as technological innovations, a must-have tool for today's humans, which is the posthuman. To a certain degree, it has simultaneously set aside reason and rationality, tools that were critical to the humanist back then. They believed that human ethics should be informed enough to help and prosper in this world. It is quite understandable that humans should continuously progress, but can and should they flourish at the expense of Others, in which the Others are everything else other than the human, i.e., all other forms of living species.

The period of humanism and the Enlightenment coincides with imperial projects undertaken by the West, especially by Europe. Those who were considered less than human,

such as the colonial peoples, the poor white European man, the women, both white and black, and other non-whites, were colonized, exploited, subjugated, and enslaved, respectively. For the most part, all these categories were considered less-than-human and "less-than-fully-rational" (Butterfield, 13), which became a philosophical justification for crimes against humanity committed by the rich white male, on their Others.

God, along with other ideas the humanists discard, has been seen as a cultural phenomenon that arises in different regions of the world with different belief systems. Faith, belief, and religion are cultural components passed down from generation to generation. Just like genes, culture and its components that are inherited from generation to generation, are the "new replicators" that "leave the old gene panting far behind". (Dawkins, 1976, p. 249). The cultural component of the belief in God is according to Dawkins passed on through the process of imitation, i.e. passed on from one to the next just as genes are passed on through natural selection: "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Ibid.).

Meme is the name Dawkins gives to "a unit of cultural transmission" (Ibid). He further explains how and why the God meme has so successfully been transmitted in the meme pool: "Consider the idea of God. We do not know how it arose in the meme pool. Probably it originated many times by independent 'mutation'… What is it about the idea of God that gives it stability and penetrance in the cultural environment?" (Ibid., p. 250). For him, the answer lies in "its great psychological appeal" and that it also provides consolation for the "troubling questions about existence" (ibid). How will God survive among humans, and how has God survived among humans? He says: "God exists, if only in the form of a meme with high survival value, or infective power, in the environment provided by human culture" (Ibid.).

With the dawn of Humanism, the God meme was challenged and became a recessive meme by the humanists. "The meme for blind faith secures its own perpetuation by the simple unconscious expedient of discouraging rational enquiry" (Ibid., p. 257)

Some "less-than-human" have today been successful in getting their freedom and their rights, such as the Rights of Man, laws against slavery, and Women's Rights. However, even today, the one and most important Other that has not yet received its due recognition is the environment, which is possible by establishing a new law- Environmental Rights. It remains to be seen if today's posthuman is capable of acknowledging the equality of other species, the flora and the fauna that the Age of the Anthropocene demands.

III. The Posthumanist Dilemma

Is it important to emphasize the human in posthumanism? Stefan Herbrechter's very apt definition of posthumanism will guide us in answering this question. He defines posthumanism as: "the cultural malaise or euphoria that is caused by the feeling that arises once you start taking the idea of 'postanthropocentrism' seriously" (Herbrechter, 2013, p. 3). Herbrechter, in his book *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis,* emphasizes that posthumanism should not be temporally situated after humanism, which is to say that posthumanism is "not post-human but post-humanist"**.** In other words, humanism must be deconstructed and removed from a central position towards a philosophy of post-anthropocentrism. Humanism here is understood as a philosophical thought that is anthropocentric.

Posthumanism must leave humanism behind, as rationalized by the humanist, and the human must strive for humanity even if it is motivated by the selfish gene. The selfish gene causes all species to behave altruistically, as Richard Dawkins demonstrates in his book *The Selfish Gene*. The human, a species of animal called *homo sapiens*, can now take the help of its long and well-evolved selfish gene, and combine it with all the reinforcements given by the humanists, such as superior rationality and freedom, to incorporate all the other species that the humanists have neglected to do good for all Others. The human is a combination of both

nature and nurture, i.e., animalism and civilization; in other words, a fusion of genes and culture.

The human species, like all other species, has survived and evolved because of its selfish gene. This human, or rather the posthuman enhanced by technology, can translate itself into collective altruism. The posthuman, to survive in the era of the Anthropocene and be successful in its endeavours, "must always already be accompanied by postanimalism"**.** Just as post-anthropocentrism rejects any hierarchization within species, especially human exceptionalism by acknowledging the importance of other living and non-living beings, post-animalism also seeks new ways of thinking about man and animal and adopts a cooperative relationship.

Joanna Zylinska is critical of the view that biology even today is being reduced to genetics, a process of thought known as genetic reductionism, as we observe in *The Selfish Gene*: "What we are faced with here are two sets of ontologically different processes and entities, with biological factors seen as genetically transmitted and cultural ones supposedly transmitted by imitation or social learning" (Zylinska, 2014, p. 51) Citing Ingold, she is also critical when Daniel Lehrman makes a clear distinction between nature and nurture. Citing Ingold, she says:

> … any such interactions occur not between genes and environment but rather between organism and environment, whereby the organism is "the continually changing embodiment of a whole history of previous interaction that have shaped its life course", while the environment exists only in relation to the organisms that inhabit it, and embodies a history of interactions with them. (Ibid.)

This idea counters Richard Dawkins's view, which suggests that the evolution of any organism or species is essentially genetic, including, to a certain degree, human evolution. However, what differentiates humans from other 'survival machines' is 'culture': "… for an understanding of modern man, we must begin by throwing out the gene as the sole basis of our ideas on evolution" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 248). Even the feeling of altruism is fundamentally gene selfishness, and in the case of humans, anthropocentric.

Being posthuman, which the majority of humans are today, is assuming a responsibility that "includes life beyond the self". For this to be possible, a posthuman turn must take place, which will be put into practice by going beyond the 'we' of humanism, i.e., embracing post-anthropocentrism alongside environmentalism. In the posthuman, "the human" and its environment are defined by the humanities, while the "post" is part of a science whose approach is "antihumanist," i.e., the human is mostly absent from the world it investigates. The human science, or rather the posthuman sciences, adopts a more blended method, deconstructive in nature and hence decentered. The post-humanities try to adopt a balanced method of blending the human, technology, and sciences without being sucked in by either:

> My dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life as embodied in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles, 1999, p. 5)

The human in a posthuman society accepts both "carbon and silicon citizens" (Hayles, 2005a, p. 148), neither humanist nor antihumanist.

One form of posthumanism, among others, is the one developed by Francesca Ferrando in her book Philosophical Posthumanism, where she marks the crossroads of (post)human(isms) and the Anthropocene. One of the forms of philosophical posthumanism that she enquires into is" decentering the human from the center of the discourse" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 22), thus assuming responsibility for the damages leading to the Anthropocene that

unavoidably plague the human condition. This profanity of human actions on the environment has been denoted as "anthrobscene" by Jussi Parikka.

Marxism, psychoanalysis, and geological 'deep time' that focuses on the Anthropocene, adopt a relativist view of anthropocentrism, while posthumanist sciences "threaten to dethrone the human and the idea of the human uniqueness from a biological, informational, cybernetic and cognitive perspective" (Herbrechter, 2013, p. 55). Herbrechter views posthumanism as an inherent crisis within humanism, while the process of becoming posthuman, which he terms "posthumanization," constantly attempts to suppress "'our' in/humanity" (Ibid., p. 84). He deconstructs the human, suggesting that posthumanization suppresses humanity by moving more and more towards cyborgization, prosthetization, digitalization, and artificial intelligence, a hybrid form of human life, while at the same time, it celebrates posthumanization, suggesting a hope for becoming better humans - a "reflexive humanization." It could also be interpreted as a warning for humans to be aware of excessive technologization and disembodiment, and, at the same time, suggests that technologization is necessary to disconnect from anthropocentrism and, consequently, post/humanize. Technology, either good (solar panels) or bad (weapons of mass destruction), can 'spoil' the human, or it can encourage the 'good' human to strive for freedom and justice for all. Humans and technology must be mutually 'taming', i.e., the human must set limits on technological development, and technology must control the human's animality.

Humanism, technologization (for human benefit), and cultural studies leave the nonhuman untouched. But as Herbrechter explains, "posthumanization must also be understood… as the expansion of subjectivity to include nonhuman actors… who rely on processes of interpellation and response-ability" (Herbrechter, 2013, p. 205). Posthumanism should therefore be viewed as a process leading towards humanness, as becoming human in the face of the environment and the nonhuman agents. It has to overcome the boundaries of humanism, to "do justice to the promise that undeniably lies within our posthuman humanity." Posthumanism must take part in the "turn to life" or "turn on life" (Ibid., p. 214), a Life-oriented humanity, rather than a Human-oriented one.

The movement from *homo sapiens* to human to posthuman, and maybe someday to superhuman, may be called transformation, expansion, mutation, or evolution. The process has been gradual and systematic. As Ihab Hassan says, "there is nothing supernatural in the process leading us to a posthumanist culture. That process depends mainly on the growing intrusion of the human mind into nature and history, on the dematerialization of life and the conceptualization of existence" (Hassan, 1977, p. 835). The more humans move away from nature, the more life becomes defamiliarized, and existence itself is put into question.

For Ihab Hassan, with the coming of the posthuman, it could probably be the end of humanism: "We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call post-humanism. The result is an expansion of human consciousness to 'cosmic dimensions', with philosophical, psychological, as well as biological and technological implications and challenges" (Ibid., p. 843). What concerns us in Hassan's point of view of posthumanism is whether humans will be able to survive the years until the human consciousness can reach the 'cosmic dimensions' before the human species comes to an end, or rather, all the species go extinct. The present human evolutionary status, reached through the processes of natural selection (Darwin), is being challenged by the same species, which is creating an environment unsuitable for its existence, also known as the Anthropocene.

IV. Darwin Versus the Anthropocene

How can the posthuman help solve the problems of the Anthropocene? Before attempting to solve this pressing dilemma of who and how the savior of the human species, the earth's other inhabitants, and the planet Earth on the whole will be, let us take a glimpse at the convergences of the posthuman with the present Age of the Anthropocene.

To begin with, the Anthropocene is an irreversible geological epoch marked by significant human interference in and influence on Earth's natural evolution. While some scholars and scientists situate the beginning of this epoch in the advent of farming and domestication, others place it with the Agricultural Revolution, others with the Industrial Revolution, and a few with post-World War II and the atomic bomb era. Whatever the date of the Anthropocene's beginning, its cause is the mishandling of human technological and scientific development, most notably during the Industrial Revolution, when the steam engine was invented, and more and more fossil fuels were consumed to facilitate what was called the 'improving' of the human condition.

Tormenting evidence shows the significant negative impact humans have had especially over the last three centuries, such as global warming, extinction of hundreds of species- mass extinction, deforestation leading to high levels of CO2 in the air, pollution, non-biodegradable waste, death of sea corals due to acidification of oceans, polar ice melts, and innumerable other alterations in the natural being of the environment.

As seen above, there are several understandings of posthumanism. However, the definition that concerns us here is to show the convergences between posthumanism and the Anthropocene, in which posthumanism uses science and technology beyond bounds, exploiting nature to enhance itself without considering its harmful environmental impact. The Anthropocene has made humans rethink what makes us really human.

As the ecosphere and geosphere undergo many changes, scientists and scholars are developing specialized terminology to describe them. One such expression is "Earth Overshoot Day," the day of the year when all the resources produced on Earth have been used up, and for the rest of the year, the Earth is overtaxed, leading to the depletion of land and resources.

Morten Tønnessen and Kristin Armstrong raise two important questions: "Will the Anthropocene ever end?" and "Should the Anthropocene end…?" A third question they ask is: "If so, is it a duty for morally and ecologically conscious human beings to work for a societal development that would eventually lead to an end of the Anthropocene?" They find the answer to these questions in James Lovelock's "sustainable retreat". For them, a key solution to restoring Earth's resources and overall well-being is sustainable development.

For Critzen and Stoermer, the step towards preserving the earth is "global sustainable, resource management" ("Anthropocene")

V. Conclusion

For Zylinska, adding humility to any attempt to restore the Earth is important to any ethical project (Zylinska, 2014, p. 66). Her communication, a form of knowledge or wisdom, and the ethics passed on through narratives can help humans rebuild the environment. In addition, she stresses that a post-anthropocentric approach is of prime importance:

> …even through *it is not about us* [original italics], we humans have a singular responsibility to give an account of matter, of which we are part. Ethics is therefore constitutively linked with poetics, because it comes to us through stories, i.e. through narratives of different genres and kinds… We need such instructions because we come into the world unformed, lacking the basic capacities to move within it, communicate with Others and transform our surroundings. (Ibid., p. 68)

The kind of ethics that she is talking about is "not just about being-in but also about being-with" (Ibid., p. 91). Ethical responsibility is a human responsibility as much as it is the responsibility of each individual; it is both collective and individual.

Although humanists are primarily anthropocentric, either because of their selfish genes or due to cultural evolution, because of nature or nurture, scientists and humanists must work together in the debate of climate change and throw light on the possibility for the future:

"Global warming calls for new and plural understandings of nature, the nature-culture web, and the techno-culture that follows (Merchant, 2020, p. 9)." Carolyn Merchant also points out an essential must-have relation between nature and humanity: "History is based not on simple cause-and-effect relations but on give-and-take processes (Ibid., p. 24)." She ends her book with a mantra: "Solar panel on every roof, bicycles in every garage, and vegetables in every backyard (Ibid., p. 156)."

Humans have yet to realize that our existence does not depend solely on the existence of the human species. Humans share 99% of their genes with other living beings, and 100% of human existence is a combination of the in-human, i.e., matter, and the non-human. Therefore, for the selfish survival of the human self, it must behave altruistically and responsibly towards all Others.

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