Rationalist Inhumanism
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If the concept of the human has a fundamental feature that remains more or less constant from antiquity to the present day, it is the idea that humanity is something more than one species of animal amongst others. Western culture was founded upon myths that sever us from the animal order, reinforced by their formalisation in philosophical and theological accounts of the natural order, and consolidated by their elaboration in classical humanism. This supplement is articulated in various ways within the Western tradition, but it is the perennial picture of ‘Man’ as the rational animal that unites them in distinguishing us from other animals. The traditional role of the humanities has been to preserve and refine the cultural self-understanding that has formed around this picture, supplying both descriptive and normative resources for individual and collective self-determination.

However, as Foucault has shown, even though classical humanism wrested the study of ‘human nature’ from its religious foundations, its understanding of this concept ‘excluded any possibility of a Classical science of man’ (Foucault 2002: 336). It is the reconfiguration of the human as the object of new ‘human sciences’ that constitutes the historical break between the classical and modern systems of knowledge. Though the classical rationalism of Descartes understood the world in terms of a knowing subject that had no place within it, it instigated an anthropological turn that, following Kant’s critique of reason, implanted this subject in the modern concept of the human: ‘a strange empirico-transcendental doublet... a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible’ (Foucault 2002: 347). The most influential aspect of Foucault’s analysis is its conclusion, which suggests that this doublet is coming undone in the same manner as the classical concept of human nature, and foresees that ‘man [will] be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea’ (Foucault 2002: 419-422).

This prophecy has been born out by four interacting trends: i) the natural sciences have progressively undermined the supposed uniqueness of our animality, by isolating empirical study of \textit{homo sapiens} from our cultural understanding of the human; ii) the humanities have aggressively critiqued the purported universality of our rationality, by exposing the illicit privileging of masculine, bourgeois, and European forms of life implicit in the association of reason with Western civilisation; iii) technological advancement has begun to compound these theoretical trends, by modifying and even threatening to recreate our cognitive capacities in artificial forms; and iv)
environmental crisis has begun to catalyse the cultural consequences of these other trends, by confronting our societies with the *impermanence* of the natural order underlying the residual vestiges of the classical worldview. These trends have resulted in the emergence of several strands of posthumanism, which aim to supplant the conceptual foundations of classical humanism and its anthropological variants.

Transhumanism is the oldest and most well developed of these, and is concerned principally with the capacity of emerging technologies to overcome the limitations of the ‘human condition’ as traditionally conceived (trend (iii)) and the normative implications thereof (More 2013). Critical posthumanism is an attempt to complete the auto-deconstruction of the humanities (trend (ii)) by bringing the resources of critical theory and philosophical antihumanism to bear on the ‘posthuman condition’ as a whole (incorporating trends (i), (iii) and (iv)) (Braidotti 2013: 13-54). It accuses transhumanism of uncritically retaining central elements of classical humanism, including a cache of metaphysical distinctions such as mind/body and culture/nature, and a normative focus on self-determination (Braidotti 2013: 89-104). By contrast, speculative posthumanism takes the residual humanism of transhumanism to consist in underestimating the possible differences between humans and posthumans indicated by natural science and technological advancement (trends (i) and (iii)) (Roden 2014: 13-23). Importantly, it rejects the contention that posthuman intelligences are bound by the constraints of human rationality (Roden 2014: 58-82).

Rationalist inhumanism is an alternative to these positions that attempts to extract the normative core of humanism from its imbrication with the biological and historical contingencies of the human species (confronting trends (i) and (ii)), so as to explicitly articulate and defend aspects of the residual humanism that critical and speculative posthumanism locate in transhumanism (Wolfendale 2016). It does this by exploring the connection between the explanatory programmes of Kantian critique and artificial general intelligence (AGI) (Adams et. Al, 2012), on the one hand (embracing trend (iii)), and rejecting the theological equilibrium presupposed by every normative appeal to nature (Brassier 2014: 485), on the other (embracing trend (iv)).

Its rationalism lies in its affirmation of those features of humanism that are consequences of the idea that humans are defined by their the capacity for rational agency: it understands the functional distinction between animal *sentience* and human *sapience* in terms of the difference between reliable differential response (e.g., uttering ‘x is red’ in the presence of red things) and conceptual competence (e.g., understanding that ‘x is red’ implies ‘x is not green’) (Brandom 2009: 200-206), or ‘the capacity to engage in discursive practices’ more generally (Negarestani 2014: 429-438); and it understands the normative rift between nature and culture in terms of *autonomy*, or the capacity for individual and collective self-determination (Brassier 2014).
Its *inhumanism* lies in its rejection of those features of humanism that are consequences of indexing these capacities to the biology, psychology, and cultural history of *homo sapiens*: it sees *reason* as an abstract protocol that has been functionally implemented by the techno-linguistic infrastructure of human culture (Negarestani 2014: 452-460; Wolfendale 2016); and it sees *freedom* as an ‘insurrectionary force’ that has bootstrapped itself out of evolutionary pre-adaptations and reformatted the human species as a suitable processing platform (Singleton 2014: 504-507; Wolfendale 2016). It is this attempt to locate an alien vector *within* humanism which pushes it beyond itself that calls for the prefix *in-* rather than *anti-, post-,* or even *trans-*. It is worth examining how Negarestani invokes Foucault in order to describe this dynamic:

A universal wave that erases the self-portrait of man drawn in sand, inhumanism is a vector of revision. It relentlessly revises what it means to be human by removing its supposedly self-evident characteristics while preserving certain invariances. (Negarestani 2014: 427)

Insofar as the concept of the human articulates our cultural self-understanding it is not merely subject to passive change – as we have seen in the transitions between pre-classical, classical, and modern eras – but open to active revision in accordance with the norm of collective self-determination. Inhumanism turns humanism’s commitment to self-determination upon itself by elaborating the consequences of this radical revisability.

The theoretical consequence is the dissection of the empirico-transcendental doublet and a renewed *transcendentalism*: ‘rejecting not only psychologism and historicism, but all concrete forms of the anthropological prejudice, we attempt to question afresh the limits of thought, and to renew contact in this way with the project for a general critique of reason.’ (Foucault 2002: 372) The ‘invariances’ that cannot be revised in the process of self-determination are precisely the conditions of possibility of revision and self-determination themselves. This dissection of ‘Man’ extracts the universal subject of classical rationalism from its empirical cladding, flaying the masculine, bourgeois, and European specificities hidden behind its supposed otherworldliness from its abstract operational form, and leaving nothing but a set of functions that can be realized in diverse material substrates and divergent forms of life: humans, animals, aliens, and machines alike can adopt the role of sapient subjects and autonomous agents, so long as they possess the corresponding capacities. The connection between Kantian critique and AGI lies in their concern with providing the most *minimal* description of these capacities: a functional diagram of what something would have to do to be *generally* capable of thought and action (Deutsch, 2012).

The practical consequence is a form of *prometheanism* commensurate with transhumanism: ‘the project of re-engineering ourselves and our world on a more rational basis.’ (Brassier 2014: 487) If inhumanism treats ‘supposedly self-evident characteristics’ of humanity – such as vocational
sociality, dimorphic sexuality, or terrestrial domesticity – as conceptual determinations to be discarded in searching for minimal conditions for abstract autonomy, then prometheanism treats these same characteristics as empirical obstacles to be surmounted in achieving maximal conditions for concrete freedom. There are distinct promethean projects concerned with each obstacle just mentioned: accelerationism strives to turn the emancipatory tendencies of modernity against the oppressive sociality of capitalism (Srnicek and Williams, 2014), xenofeminism aims to harness the artificiality of identity by rejecting the givenness of material conditions (sex) and social forms (gender) alike (Cuboniks, 2015), and cosmism enjoins us ‘to consider the earth a trap,’ treating gravity as one more constraint to be overcome by the ‘generalised escapology’ of design (Singleton, 2014). The inhumanism of these projects lies in their embrace of alienation as a positive force, transforming our progressive exile from a series of edenic harmonies – be they economic, sociological, or environmental – into an esoteric genealogy of freedom.

Ultimately, what differentiates critical and speculative posthumanism from rationalist inhumanism is that they overcome ‘Man’ by renewing metaphysics rather than transcendentalism (Foucault 2002: 372). Critical posthumanism collapses the distinction between human and non-human by positing a universal vitality – \textit{zoe} – in which both partake (Braidotti 2013: 131), whereas speculative posthumanism articulates the disconnect between human and posthuman by positing a category of functionally autonomous assemblages to which both belong (Roden 2014: 124-149). The choice between these paths can be framed in terms of the perennial picture from which we began: do we unbind animality from the \textit{normative} constraints of rationality, or unbind rationality from the \textit{metaphysical} constraints of animality?
Bibliography


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