Conclusion: Dehumanisation, or, Humanism Without Humans

> Müssen wir Unmenschen werden, um die Menschheit zu retten?[1]
>
> [I]t has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories.[2]

Is (un)learning to be human as a 'programme' for CPH not more than a little counterintuitive but maybe outright suicidal at a time when we, humans, are witnessing again some of the worst kind of dehumanisation on around us? The ongoing war of attrition in Ukraine, the images of the barbaric actions committed by Hamas terrorists, the humanitarian crisis as a result of Israeli retribution, these might be seen to spell an entirely undesirable form of 'unlearning to be human'. Is it enough for me to dissociate myself from this stubbornly humanist take on the phrase by saying: this is not at all what I mean by (un)learning? Will CPH not inevitably be placed alongside these general and apparently timeless tendencies of 'dehumanisation' that our so-called 'posthuman times' seem to imply? From a humanist point of view, dehumanisation is taking away what is ultimately most precious about humans, their dignity, the dignity of the human victim just, as much as that of the human perpetrator of violence, a violence that works both psychologically (by 'seeing' the other human as somehow 'less than human', or at least as a 'human that does not count as fully human') and physically (by treating the other human as nonhuman animal, as object, as 'material'). The only antidote to this from of humans' falling short of their own (humanist) moral standards is a reminder of what 'we' *really* are, namely… and this is, precisely, where it becomes difficult. Humanists must appeal to some form of 'essence', an essential truth and a universally attributed sense of self or identity, shared by all members of the species, and of which dehumanisation is, consequently, a "fundamental moral misrecognition".[3]

The impossibility of this (humanist) logic, for Richard Rorty, is reason enough to stop asking "what humans actually are" (or what is our 'nature'?) and instead focus on "what humans can actually do" (or what can we make of ourselves?) – following through on the liberal pragmatism his work stands for. Rorty transforms the question of why some humans treat other humans as animals into why do humans who are aware of the fact that some humans treat other humans as animals still do not do anything about it. In other words, and more concretely, what should the liberal democratic cosmopolitan "West" do in a conflict like the one, for example, between Israelis and Palestinians, or between Russians and the Ukranians, where, like in any war of humans against humans, dehumanisation happens on both sides, or as Rorty puts it: "there seems to be no point in human beings getting involved in the quarrels between animals".[4] Rorty cuts to the chase so to speak by dismissing the entire argument about Kantian versus Nietzschean notions of why humans should be 'good' and returns

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[1] "Do we have to become non-humans to save humanity?" Hans Jonas, cited Carl Amery, *Die Botschaft des Jahrtausends: Von Leben, Tod und Würde* (Paul List: Munich, 1994), p. 102.

[2] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", in *Truth and Moral Progress: Philosophical Papers 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 185.

[3] Adrienne de Ruiter, quoted in Sophia Smith Galer, "The Harm Caused by Dehumanising Language", *BBC Future* (31 October 2023); available online at: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20231030-the-real-life-harm-caused-by-dehumanising-language (accessed 16/11/2023).

[4] Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", p. 168.

instead to the classical (Renaissance) starting point of human "malleability": "we are coming to think of ourselves [again, one might say] as the flexible, protean, self-shaping animal rather than the rational animal or the cruel animal", Rorty claims.[5] From such a 'pragmatic' point of view "nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals except historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts".[6] The political challenge is thus not to 'purify' but to *extend* the kind of 'moral community' of humans by embracing the fact that the values that people in the West predominantly see as worth defending and worth disseminating. These are the values 'we' associate with 'humaneness' in the sense of human rights and humanitarian ethics, and they do not need asking questions about 'human nature' or essentially 'inhuman' behaviour or motivations. Instead of asking metaethical questions (the ones that dominate the discussion about dehumanisation that follows below), Rorty proposes that the best way to extend the positive message of 'human rights culture' is not by increasing moral knowledge (e.g. about what the true nature of humans might be) but by telling 'sad stories' about how humans treat themselves and thus to create empathy where there wasn't any or at least not enough before. As in any of Rorty's arguments here also is a good deal of provocation, of course. It would be wrong, however, in my view, to dismiss his ideas on the basis that they seem to be based on, to sanction and to even promote traditional 'Western' ideals of cultural supremacy and universalism. Rorty's real target here as elsewhere is 'foundationalism' or 'essentialism' and this, in my view, remains an important element for CPH and its project of '(un)learning to be human'. It undoubtedly requires an element of "sentimental education", as Rorty calls it, not only about how to extend the moral community called 'humanity' but also, importantly, to go beyond its exclusivity. Empathy, between members of the same species, but maybe even more importantly across species and which may ultimately include even (some) technical 'objects', 'processes', environments, assemblages, networks and so on, works best if it is not an innate and species-specific trait. But, and this is Rorty's main message as I read it, we need to know what we want and fight for it without anchoring it to some form of moral superiority, or indeed to human exceptionalism. Rorty hints at this himself, when he says: "The relevant similarities are not a matter of sharing a deep true self that instantiates true humanity, but are such little, superficial similarities as cherishing our parents and our children – similarities that do not distinguish us in any interesting way from many nonhuman animals".[7]

(Un)learning to be human – and I am insisting on the brackets around the 'un' – signals the problem that humanism always needs to presuppose some human 'essence' that must be defended from dehumanisation while it is precisely this 'essence' that always remains humanism's big secret. Humanism defends something it does not really know, even worse, that is defined in a way that it must remain unknowable. As a discourse that sets out to explain what it means to be human, humanism places the human at its centre as 'that which remains to be defined'. In fact, in order to keep itself alive, or to legitimate itself as the most powerful, accurate and authoritative source of an eventual answer to this question of 'what makes us humans human?' it must do two things at the same time: it must 'posit' *the* human as its 'object' of knowledge, while speaking to human 'subjects' (in their irreducible plurality and

[5] *Ibid*., p. 170.
[6] *Ibid*.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 181.

difference) and make them see and agree on what they *really* are. In order to both see and *become* what they really are, however, humans need to accept the moral values humanism promotes as 'natural' and 'universal' (even though they are of course the outcome of a very particular cultural history – a history with quite a few very unsavoury aspects). Humans are thus asked to become what they have always already been, in fact, if they had had the knowledge that they nevertheless had to be 'taught' (by humanists). Apart from this obvious tautological reasoning at work here which alone should be enough for some 'intrinsic' scepticism there is also the challenge from 'outside' so to speak: given the fact that humanism did not emerge within a cultural historical void but in post-Renaissance and colonial Europe the 'universalism' of its 'human nature' will always have an undertone that will make those humans who were originally the main victims of dehumanisation (women, slaves, non-whites) feel a little 'uncomfortably' to say the least.[8]

What I thus mean by (un)learning is not denying the fact that one has to learn (and thus to be taught) to be human even though 'biologically' one may be born into this 'species', but as we know from paleoanthropology, species including our own have always had somewhat fuzzy edges.[9] Feminists following Simone de Beauvoir will recognise the analogy of this move. We will need narratives that explain humanity *outside* the dominant humanist versions. This is what CPH is all about. However, (un)learning is also not simply re-learning because there is nothing secure to go back to. We have *never* been human in the way humanism told us we were or weren't. Another thing that (un)learning does not mean, however, is that we can be anything we want to be since we have never been what we were told. (Un)learning is not a denial of all those things humans have been and will be responsible for, on the contrary. It is not about giving humans back some form of 'freedom' to decide what they want to be, but rather it is a way of finally holding them to account for what they have done – to the planet, to nonhuman others, and themselves. It is a learning process and a process of undoing, at the same time. As a teacher one should never underestimate the educational value of negativity, as long as that does not give in to radical nihilism. This is also not to deny that there are numerous human 'achievements' even though being 'proud' of them might be somewhat displaced given their costs to humans, nonhumans and the planet. (Un)learning to be human should, however, not be seen as a new form of 'Promethean' or indeed 'Epimethean shame'[10] in the sense that it may be some form of atonement for 'our' sins. It is not meant as a Catholic or religious exercise leading to some piety or sanctity. Nobody cares about the whole planetary quandary we are responsible for but us, humans. As far as (moral) responsibility goes we are the only ones capable of that, if we are really looking for some degree zero of exceptionalism. We need to care precisely because we are the only ones who can and in doing so, we will also start caring more both for ourselves and our selves. However, this should not

[8] To give just one powerful and recent example of such a critique let me refer to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in the Anti-Black World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

[9] Cf. my *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[10] Cf. Günther Anders for "Promethean Shame", in Christopher Müller, *Prometheanism: Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and Bernard Stiegler for what one might call "Epimethean Shame". Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time I, The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

be taken as a Trumpist call to make humans great again. Far from it, is all about humility, but not meekness.

(Un)learning is thus a process of deconstruction – the deconstruction of humanism – to save the world from humans and humans form themselves. In the rest of this conclusion I would like to briefly sketch some of the implications of the idea of (un)learning to be human as it has informed the individual chapters of this volume and CPH more generally – a very rudimentary roadmap for the immediate future, one might say.

Humans Without, not: Without Humans

> [Le bourreau] peut tuer un homme, mais il ne peut pas le changer en autre chose.[11]

First we need to acknowledge once again the central insight of (early) humanism and confirmed throughout the ages, namely that we do not really know what humans are and that we very likely will never know, or maybe better, that we will never be able to agree upon some kind of 'essence', 'nature' or exceptional 'ability' that should definitely make us 'human'. However, we also need to acknowledge, in the absence of all those intelligent life forms we may or may not one day encounter, that it is highly unlikely that any other species is asking itself any similar questions about their essence and identity, at least not at a philosophically abstract, metaphysical, level than us. What is important, however, is that the second aspect is not a necessary precondition for the first, in other words, this is not a justification for looking down on other species as somehow 'less evolved' or 'less than human'. It is enough to recognise the human 'difference' without attributing values of superiority to it.

One might call this minimal conception of humanness as 'human without', using Martin Crowley's term.[12] Crowley takes his cue from a passage in Jean-Luc Nancy's *Être singulier pluriel*,[13] which he translates thus: "In order for the human to be discovered, and in order for the phrase 'human meaning' to acquire some meaning, everything that has ever laid claim to the truth about the nature, essence, or end of 'man' must be undone".[14] This is Nancy's (and Crowley's) attempt at freeing the concept of the human from centuries of humanism while redefining human responsibility in postanthropocentric times. In other words, after divesting the human from all its traditional humanist characteristics used to set it apart as unique from both nonhuman animals and machines, the only thing to redefine both the human and its relationship to the planet is that of an unreserved, but no longer anthropocentric, responsibility. One might call this a 'residual' humanness which however cannot be translated into some kind of 'characteristic'. It can only be affirmed through the process of (self)divestment of the human without (qualities), or the human as "vestigial", as Crowley writes:[15] "The *human without* is the human exposed to global injustice, and the vestigial, angry

[11] "The executioner can kill a human, but they cannot change it into something else." Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* [1947] (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 230.
[12] Originally, '*l'homme sans*' in Martin Crowley, *L'Homme sans: Politiques de la finitude* (Paris: Lignes, 2009).
[13] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 11.
[14] Quoted in Martin Crowley, "The Human Without", *Oxford Literary Review* 27.1 (2005): 68.
[15] *Ibid*., p. 77.

resistance to this injustice… [it is] the resisting name of the exposure we share with every being".[16] One might call this, with Nancy, a residual or vestigial "humanity without humanism",[17] which, as will be very clear, is quite the opposite of all the ambient ('posthuman') extinction scenarios that play with the idea of a 'world without humans'.

Nancy's (and Crowley's) approach is the result of a very specific line of argument that comes down to us from the experience of the Holocaust in writers like Robert Antelme, Primo Levi, Jean Améry and others, taken up by Levinas, Blanchot, Foucault, Derrida and others in the discussion of the 'end(s) of man' (and the notion of 'survival' [*survivance*]) in the 1970s and 1980s). The most iconic (and most paradoxical) statement in this respect and which addresses the unthinkable (and therefore that which is in most urgent need to be thought) shared humanity of both victims and executioners is Blanchot's comment on Antelme's *Espèce humaine* (1947): "l'homme est indestructible et (…) pourtant il peut être détruit",[18] which does away with the triumphalism of traditional humanism, and instead focuses on shared vulnerability, as Levinas, writes, for example: "in spite of all its generosity, Western humanism has never managed to doubt triumph or understand failure or conceive of a history in which the vanquished and the persecuted might have some value".[19]

A comparable trajectory for a necessary human 'divestment' – the kind of (un)learning I have been advocating – could also undoubtedly be constructed through a closer investigation of the predominantly German speaking tradition of 'negative anthropology', following on from Helmuth Plessner and taken up by Theodor Adorno, Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Ulrich Sonnemann, Ulrich Horstmann, Odo Marquard, Hans Blumenberg, Dietmar Kamper, Norbert Bolz and others,[20] ultimately translating in the kind of 'critical humanism' advocated by the Frankfurt School with its very own working though of the Enlightenment tradition, its ideals and shortcomings – a complex undertaking that I will have to postpone to another time and occasion.[21] However, it is quite obvious that the idea of an ultimately undefinable human, its constant 'disappearance', can easily be found in Plessner's notion of the *homo absconditus* or Anders's notion of human '*Weltfremdheit*' (alienation from the

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[16] *Ibid*., pp. 78-79.

[17] Nancy, *Les Muses* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 122; quoted in Crowley, "The Human Without", p. 77.

[18] "The human is indestructible and yet it may be destroyed". Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 192. See also Daniel Dobbels, ed., *Robert Antelme : Textes inédits sur* L'Espèce humaine – *Essais et témoignages* (Paris : Gallimard, 1996), and Martin Crowley, *Robert Antelme : Humanity, Community, Testimony* (Oxford : Legenda, 2003), as well as Améry's *Radical Humanism: Selected Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Another key text in this debate is of course Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* [197s] (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[19] Emmanuel Levinas, "Antihumanism and Education", *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* [1963] (London: Athlone, 1990), p. 282.

[20] This is something I referred to in "Posthumanism's German Genealogies", a keynote delivered at "Posthumanism and the Posthuman: Chances and Challenges", University of London, March 2023, which awaits its further elaboration and publication but can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_2VRY-u-II (accessed 17/11/2023).

[21] For an overview see Hannes Bajohr and Sebastian Edinger, eds., *Negative Anthropologie: Ideengeschichte und Systematik einer unausgeschöpften Denkfigur* (Berlin:; De Gruyter, 2021) and Christian Dries, *Die Welt als Vernichtungslager: Eine kritische Theorie der Moderne im Anschluss an Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt und Hans Jonas* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012).

world). They thus, in turn, call for a kind of (un)learning of the traditional humanistic ways of making sense of the human and question traditional forms of legitimation of anthropocentrism. The 'strange' evasiveness that compromises any attempt to pin down a human 'nature', for negative anthropology becomes the most human characteristic as such. Contemporary readers of negative anthropology can therefore draw a direct line between the beginning of the 20th and the 21st centuries in which a different (arguably, through the process of (un)learning now deconstructed) notion of the human returns in the new context of the 'Anthropocene'.[22] For the kind of CPH I have been arguing for in my own work, however, even a negative anthropology, which does not pretend to know who or what the human *is* or *might be* is still, of course, inevitably focused on the *Anthropos* and its (increasingly problematic) 'centrality'. Hence my suggestion of an (un)learning process, at a time when humans realise and learn afresh their relationality and entanglement with nonhuman others, without however ignoring their 'difference', and also without deducing any exceptionality from this apart from a heightened sense of responsibility. CPH might thus re-engage with the human in the form of a 'negative *post*-anthropology', whose aim it must be to work through our 'residual' humanness as divested of any known form humanism. Whether this would still be a recognisable 'anthropology' is another question, since nonhumans would play at least as central a part in it as humans.[23]

Dehumanisation

> [A]nimalization is not incompatible with humanization: what is commonly deemed dehumanization is, in the main, more accurately interpreted as the violence of humanization or the burden of inclusion into a racially hierarchized universal humanity.[24]

'Extracting' the human from its traditional humanist discourse and before 'refilling' it with any alternative positive content, so to speak, we have to, in a second move, repose the question of dehumanisation, because CPH will inevitably be accused of either downplaying and ignoring, or, indeed, exacerbating existing dehumanising trends.

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[22] This is the underlying argument in a number of recent publications, like Hannes Bajohr's, *Der Anthropos im Anthropozän: Die Wiederkehr des Menschen im Moment seiner vermeintlich endgültigen Verabschiedung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), but also already in Dietmar Kamper and Christian Wulf, eds., *Anthropologie nach dem Tode des Menschen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), Andreas Steffens, *Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts oder Die Wiederkehr des Menschen* (Leipzig, Reclam, 1999), Bernd Flessner, ed., *Nach dem Menschen: Der Mythos einer zweiten Schöpfung und das Entstehen einer posthumanen Kultur* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2000) and Bernhard Irrgang, *Posthumanes Menschsein? Künstliche Intelligenz, Cyberspace, Roboter, Cyborgs und Designer-Menschen – Anthropologie des künstlichen Menschen im 21. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005). Also noteworthy in this context are Raimar Zons, *Die Zeit des Menschen: Zur Kritik des Posthumanismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001) and Stefan Rieger, *Kybernetische Anthropologie: Eine Geschichte der Virtualität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

[23] Again, there are noteworthy and ground-breaking beginnings in, for example, Tim Ingold's work. Cf. his recent *Anthropology as/and Education* (London: Routledge, 2018), and the "Interlude 2: Animism Without Humans, or Belief without Belief", in my *Before Humanity*, pp. 81-112.

[24] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in the Anti-Black World*, p. 18.

As far as the undeniably necessary resistance to dehumanisation is concerned, this is not without conceptual problems. If CPH's ethical and political programme is 'postanthropocentrism' then this inevitably involves a (further) 'decentring' of the human, a (further) prolematisation of humanist notions of human exceptionalism and a (further) erosion of traditional boundaries between humans and nonhuman others. Humanists would see this as a kind of (re)opening of the gates to hell: a return to the barbarity of violence against humans, genocide, a challenge to human rights, humanitarianism, an attack on the inviolable sanctity and dignity of human life and so on, or the slippery slope of 'dehumanisation'. If (un)learning were to be *mis*understood along these lines (the brackets around the 'un' of (un)learning is my way of highlighting but also of addressing this anxiety) this would mean that we go along with the equation that underpins humanist morality, namely that challenging humanism and its value system is the same as challenging the human, or 'humanity' *as such*. CPH would look like a 'crime against humanity'. No wonder there is so much resistance, but it is a misguided one, because it actually undersells the human and what it can and should do. Ultimately, the humanist notion of the impossible but necessary idea of human perfectibility betrays a fundamental distrust in 'human nature'. Humans need to be humanised by (moral) education because anything else would play into the hands of its opposite, namely dehumanisation, barbarity, animality. It would mean not achieving our 'potential' – a cardinal sin in humanism's eyes, which always seems to have a clear idea of what this potential actually is. There is a German saying for this that captures everything that is problematic about this view: *den inneren Schweinehund überwinden*. It means to overcome one's baser instincts, but literally it is about overcoming this strange beast or chimera of a 'swine-dog', i.e. the combined negative stereotypes attributed to dogs and pigs.

Most theories of dehumanisation and violence of humans committed against humans start from the idea that humans are capable of inhuman behaviour because they somehow deny some humans their full humanness (which of course requires that there is at least some vague notion of what humanness entails to start with). Nick Haslam discusses dehumanisation from a social psychological view as an "everyday social phenomenon, rooted in ordinary social-cognitive processes".[25] He usefully (but also somewhat predictably) differentiates between 'animalistic dehumanisation' which denies members of an outgroup 'uniquely human characteristics' like cultural 'refinement', 'moral sensibility' or 'rationality' by 'animalising' members of a perceived outgroup, whereas 'mechanistic dehumanisaton' denies uniquely human traits like 'agency', 'individuality', 'depth' and so on by 'objectifiying' them. It is the classical Cartesian way of sanctioning human exceptionalism through a rational 'human nature' denied to both machines and animals as our main (significant) nonhuman others:

> Animalistic dehumanization involves denial of UH [Uniquely Human] attributes, typically to essentialized outgroups in the context of a communal representation of the ingroup. It is often accompanied by emotions of contempt and disgust that reflect an implicit vertical comparison and by a tendency to explain others' behaviour in terms of desires and wants rather than cognitive states. Mechanistic dehumanization, in contrast, involves the objectifying denial of essentially human attributes to people toward whom

[25] Nick Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative View", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10.3 (2006): 252.

> the person feels psychologically distant and socially unrelated. It is often accompanied by indifference, a lack of empathy, an abstract and deindividuated view of others that indicates an implicit horizontal separation from self, and a tendency to explain the other's behaviour in nonintentional, causal terms.[26]

To be fair to Haslam, the usefulness of this classification lies – this is its social psychological objective – in explaining and interpreting existing social behaviour, or, as he writes in a more recent study, in demonstrating the importance of "folk conceptions of humanness and dehumanization".[27] David Livingstone Smith deflects the debate about dehumanisation by complicating what actually 'happens' during acts of "conceiving of people as subhuman creatures rather than as human beings".[28] The important insight Smith contributes (he is of course not alone nor the first I doing so) is that "[t]aking away a person's individuality isn't the same as obliterating their humanity. An anonymous human is still human".[29] One might just as well say: a dehumanised, or "an inferior human is still human"[30] – which is precisely the point of the discussion about Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* outlined above. Perpetrators of Nazi violence against Jews in concentration camps were very much aware that their victims were humans, just that they somehow perceived their humanity as less important, less developed, less worthy of what it *truly* means to be human, precisely because they seemed to be certain of what true humanity entails and what subhumanness therefore lacks. And this is of course where the availability of subhuman characteristics matter. Where are you going to find those characteristics that you can liken subhumanness to? Smith explains dehumanisation, ultimately, through a misguided essentialism: "Dehumanized people are imagined as subhuman animals, because they are conceived as having a subhuman essence [i.e. they are human only in 'appearance']".[31] For Smith dehumanising ultimately is "an unconscious strategy for dealing with psychological conflict", namely as a way to "override inhibitions against committing acts of violence".[32] He is, however, not entirely prepared, as opposed to Rorty in his pragmatic and social constructivist account of human violence referred to above, to let go of a biological and evolutionary account of human 'nature' because as he

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[26] *Ibid*., p. 262.

[27] Cf. Haslam and Samuel Wilson, "Is the Future more or less Human? Differing Views of Humanness in the Posthumanism Debate", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 39.2 (2009): 247. Again, quite predictably, Haslam and Wilson exclusively focus on the technological side of the "posthumanism debate" and expose the differing notions of 'human nature' that underlie people's attitude towards human-technological enhancement. This time the argument is more about essentialised and non-essentialised views of human nature which determines whether people are in favour of transhumanist ideas or whether they oppose them, or, whether becoming 'posthumans' would be a process that would extend humanness or would be a process of (self)dehumanisation by technological means, so to speak.

[28] David Livingstone Smith, *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), p. 26. See also his *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) which further develops Smith's approach but in my view does not substantially extend or change it.

[29] *Less that Human*, p. 27.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 28.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 264.

[32] *Ibid*.

argues, rather than asking "what can we make of ourselves?" (i.e Rorty's focus), we need to acknowledge that "what we can make of ourselves is constrained by what we are".[33]

There is thus what Adrienne de Ruiter refers to as a "paradox of dehumanisation", since it seems that dehumanisation requires that "perpetrators simultaneously deny and acknowledge the humanity of their victims".[34] The model she proposes is based on a distinction between different types of human status that can be denied in dehumanisation. Humans can be denied their biological status, their psychological subjectivity and their normative standing, so that de Ruiter can say that:

> while dehumanisers generally (although not necessarily) acknowledge the biological status that people typically share, such as a highly developed consciousness, a sense of identity and particular semiotic and moral sensibilities, this does not entail that perpetrators are also bound to recognise the human status of their victims in a normative sense. Dehumanisation thus loses its paradoxical character, given that persons can consider others as less than human in a moral sense without necessarily regarding them as falling outside the human species or lacking human subjectivity.[35]

So rather than the denial of some human 'essence', as Smith thinks, it may be the 'moral status' (or 'subjectivity') that may be denied to victimised or dehumanised humans.

I think what becomes clear from this sketch of what is an ongoing debate largely within psychological corners about how to explain what dehumanisation is, why it is going on and what can be done about it, is that, fundamentally, whether it is nature or culture, whether it is stereotyping or scapegoating, innate evil in the species or only certain abnormal individuals – the human, if such a thing exists,[36] cannot be trusted. A certain level of (at least strategic) misanthropy (of which more below) is undoubtedly a motivation behind CPH and the notion of '(un)learning to be human' as advocated here.

One way of trying to get closer to this paradox – not just the paradox of dehumanisation, but rather the one of humanisation in the first place – is by asking: what are we *before* we become humans, in the humanist sense, or before the entire dialectic of humanisation and dehumanisation (or animalisation) called history plays itself out? We are certainly animals, but we cannot be just some *nonhuman* animals with a somehow learned humanity added on, so to speak. Dehumanised or animalised humans are still *human* (animals). If we cannot be nonhuman animals the only other way to conceptualise the 'prehuman' or 'protohuman' state or stage of ours would be the 'inhuman', in Lyotard's sense.

In *The Inhuman* Jean-François Lyotard actually differentiates between two forms of inhumanity: the inhumanity of the (technoscientific capitalist) 'system' whose mantra is 'development' (one might also say: continuous (self)transformation characterised as 'progress'), and the inhumanity of 'infancy' (the 'protohuman' state of children who are born

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[33] Ibid., p. 272.

[34] Adrienne de Ruiter, "To Be or Not to Be Human: Resolving the Paradox of Dehumanisation", *European Journal of Political Theory* 22.1 (2021): 74.

[35] *Ibid*., pp. 74-75.

[36] Ultimately it is of course just as big a *bêtise* to speak of 'the human' as it is to speak of 'the animal' to follow Derrida.

into but have yet to be 'educated' by the system).[37] For Lyotard, the infant inhuman is not a form of original *de*humanised state, if anything it would be radically *un*human (*not* to be understood as: not yet 'fully' human, in the sense that e.g. prehistoric humanoids were considered to be not (yet) fully human).[38] In fact, the liminal positioning of the early inhuman is the only hope for resistance to the increasingly inhumane inhumanity of the system, for which the human is becoming more and more dispensable. In fact, for the future survival of the 'civilisation of development' the central question becomes "Can Thought Go on Without a Body",[39] given that survival on this planet is ultimately impossible in our current embodied (i.e. biological) form because of its inevitable 'heat death'. What Lyotard seems to derive from this analysis of 'our' situation is not a posthumanism, maybe, but it is also no revived or reconstructed form of humanism. Maybe one might best call it an 'inhumanism' – in the sense of a return to some more 'originary' humanness. Derek Ford in *Inhuman Educations* sees this as a specifically Lyotardian notion of pedagogy, a pedagogy that "resist[s] the inhumanity of the system *by means of* the inhumanity of the infant". [40] Inhuman infancy in Lyotard's understanding is a human otherness, or an other humanness, that is threatened with obliteration by the system's 'education' but is also preserved by the system as a source of (human) creativity because it might serve the system in perpetuating and perfecting itself.[41] By "bearing witness" to this inhuman infancy, which persists in its repression, Ford writes, "we can resist the inhuman of the system" and "remain human".[42] Quite obviously I would like to claim Lyotard's 'inhumanism' as a form of '(un)learning to be human' – an anamnesis of the systemic (liberal) humanism that tells 'us' that we have to *become* who we *are* (and which, of course, knows exactly what we are not). Lyotard's inhumanism is one way of understanding CPH and its motivation for an ongoing deconstruction of humanism as a form of resistance against transhumanist ideals of 'overcoming', 'transcending' or 'surpassing' the human, which is precisely the trajectory that the system of (increasingly autonomous techno-scientific neoliberal capitalist) development portrays as 'inevitable' to today's humans. Dehumanisation, in this context, takes on an alternative meaning depending on one's understanding of the 'human' in 'dehumanisation': to excavate another humanity by bearing witness or by re-membering the inhumanity of human infancy, by working through the inhumanity of the humanism of the system, requires a form of dehumanisation (which I have called (un)learning) that has nothing to do with some kind of a return of the repressed or some

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[37] Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* [1988] (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

[38] For a problematisation of the 'reverse teleology' (a view that sees the present as an inevitable outcome of the past) at work in such an (anthropocentric) evolutionary notion of 'becoming human' see again my *Before Humanity*, *passim*.

[39] Lyotard, "Can Thought Go on Without a Body?", *The Inhuman*, pp. 8-23. See also Lyotard's "A Postmodern Fable", *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 83-102.

[40] Derek R. Ford, *Inhuman Educations: Jean-François Lyotard, Pedagogy, Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 2.

[41] This is where Lyotard's understanding meets neocybernetics and second order (Post-Luhmannian) system's theory and their specific relevance for a posthumanist position in Cary Wolfe's and Bruce Clarke's work. Cf. e.g. Wolfe's *Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the "Outside"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and Clarke's *Posthuman Meatmorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[42] Ford, *Inhuman Educations*, p. 11.

idea of 'animalisation', or as a return to 'barbarity'. It all depends on which direction one thinks 'barbarity' lies and whose notion of (in)humanity one may trust,[43] a humanism that ultimately envisages a future without humans, or humans that are able to divest themselves of 'their' humanism (but not their humanity) and a 'humanism' which is no longer humanist but 'inhumanist'.

Humanism Without Humans, Humans Without Humanism, Humanism Without Humanism

> That immense and unquestionable suffering has been caused by human animals on other human animals and nonhuman animals alike throughout history attests to the disconnect we are able to muster between what we feel and how we evaluate what we do.[44]

What I have been working towards in this volume is of course what one might call a politics worthy of our time, a *post*humanist politics, inscribed into the pedagogical argument of '(un)learning to be human'. What are the options for such a politics and what are its odds? In other words, how to escape a humanism that itself has either become hijacked by or has allied itself to an inhuman(e) system and which sees no major problem in humans translating themselves into better (post)humans by becoming more and more (like 'their') technology – a humanism (ultimately) without humans?

Frédéric Neyrat in discussing his *Homo Labyrinthus*[45]says that "Humanism is the human who dreams that he is capable of being what he should have been".[46] I propose a minor addition: humanism is what tells the human that it is capable of being what *humanism* thinks he should have been, which prompts the need for unlearning to be human in this humanist sense. It is a re-education process along the lines of a postanthropocentric ethics and politics that CPH stands for even though this would not be a process of education in the traditional humanist sense and would probably require a major rethink and a further deconstruction of existing educational institutions. To humanists it would probably look more like 'de-education' (as in 'de-skilling'. In CPH's terms, however, it would precisely be a 're-skilling' in the sense of what humans are capable of once they start thinking of themselves as decentred, entangled, distributed and so on.

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[43] On Lyotard's notion of 'inhumanity' see also Scott Brewester et al., eds., *Inhuman Reflections: Thinking the limits of the Human* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), Stuart Sim, *Lyotard and the Inhuman* (London: Icon, 2001), Ashley Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition: Reflections on Nihilism, Information, and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). On the notion of 'inhumanism' see Julian Murphet, "A Modest Proposal for the Inhuman", *Modernism/Modernity* 23.3 (2016): 651-670; and the conclusion to my *Before Humanity* ("Becoming Inhuman"), pp. 208-218.

[44] Andrew Oberg, "All Too Human? Speciesism, Racism, and Sexism", *Think* 43 (2016): 47-48.

[45] Frédéric Neyrat, *Homo Labyrinthus: Humanisme, Antihumanisme, Posthumanisme* (Paris: Éditions Dehors, 2015).

[46] Neyrat, "Escaping Humanism: An Interview with Frédéric Neyrat", *PCA-Stream* (n.d.); available online at: https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/frederic-neyrat-escaping-humanism-91 (accessed 22/11/2023).

How, therefore, think about humans without humanism? Is this not a contradiction in terms? Is not, following the logic of discursivity any thinking about humans necessarily humanist in the sense that humanism is that discourse that produces knowledge about what it means to be human as outlined above? And is not that discourse inevitably anthropocentric since it takes the human as its central transcendental signified and its truth? Undoubtedly, but what would be the alternative since any posthumanism is condemned to repeat, even *critically*, while working through, humanist notions of the human? Inhabiting (humanism and its remainders) strategically and deconstructively seems the only option. A certain 'strategic misanthropy' might be CPH's only option to get closer to, and to get at, Lyotard's inhuman. Strategic misanthropy is, in my view, what Daniel Cottom has in mind when he writes that we need misanthropy "so as not to close our hearts to the cultural hope that is to be found, both within and without us, only in what appears at any given moment to be unhuman".[47] Again, I would like to make a strategic minor adjustment: the hope for another human to be found both within us (i.e. within humanist conceptions of the human) and without (postanthropocentric or posthumanist notions of what it means to be human) lies maybe not in the unhuman, but Lyotard's inhuman at our given moment, i.e. that which resists its own posthumanisation, or Crowley's (or Nancy's, or Antelme's…) *l'homme sans*, with its residual 'humanity', maybe in the form of a (radicalised) co-existentialism.[48] In this sense, misanthropy would no longer be a 'hate' of humans, but of *Anthropos*, along the lines of 'hating the sin, not the sinner'.

The position that remains for CPH is a paradoxical one. It resists traditional humanism because:

- humanism does not do justice to humans in their irreducible difference and plurality;
- in its liberal version humanism has allied itself to technoscientific capitalist modernity which ultimately wishes to transcend the human;
- humanism's anthropocentrism disregards the entanglement with and the importance of nonhumans.

On the other hand, CPH is ethically motivated by care for the excluded of humanism, which also includes, ironically, humans themselves, since it believes (with Lyotard, Latour and many others) that we were never human (in the modern, humanist, sense). Instead of a humanism without humans, one might say, it works towards humans without humanism. But since politics is about collectivities, solidarities and futures, CPH cannot change anything without a narrative that speaks to humans. A certain kind of humanism that explains to humans what they should do and strive for in our current 'climate' and 'condition' is therefore *required*. The challenge is whether it can be a humanism 'without' humanism. For me this would be a stance that is critical but not dismissive of humanism by being carefully but certainly not triumphantly posthumanist, i.e. by taking the ethical imperative of a de-anthropocentered worldview seriously and constructing the best possible political future for everyone, including humans. It is, one could say, 'what we owe the future', provided that the future is not purely about

[47] Daniel Cottom, *Unhuman Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 158.
[48] Cf. Sam Mickey's *Coexistentialism and the Unbearable Intimacy of Ecological Emergency* (Lanham: Lexington, 2016).

humans and that future politics or politics of the future are no longer exclusively 'anthropolitics'.[49]

Which also means of course that technology should not be posthumanism's exclusive, maybe not even its dominant, concern. This is how I read Kate Soper's critique of posthumanism as it is often understood, namely as, if not as outright 'techno-utopian', then at least as 'technocentric':

> It is far from clear why the erosion of the organic and inorganic distinction should be thought of as offering any very pleasurable or liberating opportunities for individual self-realisation let alone provide a platform for a collective post-capitalist utopian agenda.[50]

As long as the 'techniques' of objectification and animalisation continue to be available they need to be addressed, resisted and undone, unlearned, but this cannot be achieved by a simple erasure of differences (between humans and machines, and between human and nonhuman animals, and indeed between animals and machines one might add). Didier Fassin's critique of posthumanism as "eluding history and circumventing politics", as a consequence of a "lack of interest in human agency",[51] is not true of all posthumanisms. It is certainly not true of CPH as I understand it. It is simply wrong to say that posthumanism in general "has little to say about forms of domination and oppression as well as of resistance and emancipation – phenomena that are human, after all".[52] The motivation behind the programme of '(un)learning to be human' is CPH's way of demanding and extending human responsibility. It is the forging of new forms of solidarity (between humans and nonhumans) and resisting the inhumanity of an increasingly posthuman system – a system that wants to do away with 'us' (the biological, the living) even while some of 'us' seem to find this perspective enticing. This is why the 'animal side' of posthumanism is so important to counterbalance what would otherwise be a new form of technocentrism. Bio-techno-politics in its currently predominant form, namely a toxic alliance between technocapitalist neoliberalism and technoeuphoric transhumanism needs to be resisted by CPH and the only way to achieve this is to strengthen our solidarities with the nonhuman by stressing our shared "creatureliness"[53] and vulnerability with the living, or, in Lynn Worsham's words: "the way forward, beyond anthropocentrism and humanism to posthumanism, consists in our collective efforts to appreciate this difficulty of reality [i.e. the reality of our vulnerability and eventual death], to keep in focus this history of shared woundedness and finitude"[54]. The solidarities

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[49] Needless to say that William MacCaskill's, *What We Owe the Future: A Million-Year View* (London: Oneworld, 2022) comes a great deal closer to such a politics as James Susskind's, *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[50] Kate Soper, "Humans, Animals, Machines", *New Formations* 49 (2003): 107.

[51] Didier Fassin, "Humanism: A Critical Appraisal", *Critical Times* 2.1 (2019): 36.

[52] *Ibid*.

[53] Cf. Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[54] Lynn Worsham, "Toward an Understanding of Human Violence: Cultural Studies, Animal Studies, and the Promise of Posthumanism", *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 35.1: 51-76.

of “interdependence”, as David Wood calls it,[55] and as Timothy Morton also advocates,[56] ultimately are the reason why I have been insisting on CPH - a *critical* post-human-ism – as the most coherent stance for our time, and on unlearning to be human (in the humanist sense) as its main programme. It begins with what one might call, with Jean-Christophe Bailly, by being in touch with our “animal side”: “we should move beyond human exclusivity (…) we should let go of the eternally renewed credo according to which our species is the pinnacle of creation and has a unique future [and instead realise that] the world in which we live is gazed upon by other beings, that the visible is shared among creatures, and that a politics could be invented on this basis, if it is not too late”. [57]

[55] In David Wood, *Thinking Plant Animal Human: Encounters with Communities of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

[56] Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017); see also my “Solidarity”, *Genealogy of the Posthuman* (2022); available online at: https://criticalposthumanism.net/solidarity/ (accessed 24/11/2023).

[57] Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 15.