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Beyond Human Rights

by

Ethan Cospier

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry PhD

ABSTRACT

The concept of Human Rights today holds the same sanctity as the divine right of kings. Underpinning Human Rights is a concept of a Human as an enduring metaphysical entity, a concept that has been inscribed onto bodies throughout history. Human Rights, as we think of them, say, in the context of international politics, operate through an ethics of equivalence, which is to say that underpinning these rights is an assumption of equality of all Humans universally. This ethic abstracts from the very Human beings it claims to represent, and it rests on the claim that there is an essence embedded within them that is inalienable, eternal, and equivalent in every Human. The problem is that these doctrines do not actually make people equal; they instead allow Humans to be viewed in abstraction from everything that makes them the persons that they are. My task is to challenge this concept.

INDEX WORDS: Human Rights, Social Contract, Transhumanism, Ethics, political philosophy.

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2023

DEDICATION

For Tori

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing an honors thesis is more difficult than you would expect, a feat that would have not been possible without the expertise of my mentor Dr. Jessica Berry. I can finally write somewhat comprehensible pieces thanks to her guidance.

To my cousin India, without you I would have never read the books I cite and would most likely not have the ability to begin writing anything like this.

To my friends, thank you for putting up with conversations about human rights for the past couple of years. Sorry.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis looks critically at the concept of Human Rights and its philosophical and metaphysical presuppositions.¹ Underpinning Human Rights is a concept of a Human as an enduring metaphysical entity, a concept that has been inscribed onto bodies with various meanings at different points in history. I begin by tracking the “origins” of Human Rights and following them through their development from Natural Law to the current conception of what a right is. Human Rights, as we think of them, say, in the context of international politics,² operate through an ethics of equivalence, which is to say that underpinning these rights is an assumption of equality of all Humans universally. This ethic abstracts from the very Human beings it claims to represent, and it rests on the claim that there is an essence embedded within them that is inalienable, eternal, and equivalent in every Human. The problem is that these doctrines do not actually make people equal; they instead allow Humans to be viewed in abstraction from everything that makes them the persons that they are. There is irony in the idea of a natural law based on equality, for nature itself is not equal. Further, this method assumes a universality of values, applicable across cultures and history. My task is to challenge that assumption.

We must begin to ask the question, who do these rights serve? What power relations are ensured through their continuation? In order to obtain rights, you must first be a Human, which guarantees your status as a citizen and, further, as a subject. These citizens are directed to emancipate themselves through means of participation the state sanctions as valid, for instance, the ballot box, peaceful protests, and infographics.

¹ The term Human will be capitalized in this thesis. This distinction from the other option, “human” draws on the idea that even though Human as a concept is socially constructed, it has been reified to the point that there is no way around it. Its effect, regardless of the acknowledgment of its social construction is still very Real.

² I should acknowledge I will be focused on the philosophical underpinnings of rights in this thesis.

There will surely be those who recognize the limitations of the concept of Human Rights as it is employed in our political rhetoric and of the underlying conception of the Human. Mainly these have been post- and trans-humanists who yearn for the overcoming of the flesh. But their program is in fact a rejection of life. The Human as it exists has bodily limitations that can be overcome with technology. In the transhumanists' view, the mind is separate from the body, and the mind has infinite potential that is being constrained by their body. I will argue against this viewpoint and look for ways to move forward, beyond the concept of Human Rights.

2 AN AUTOPSY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

“Person” is a forensic term.

—John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Penguin, 1690), p. 449.

The concept of Human Rights today holds the same sanctity as the divine right of kings in the seventeenth century. The naturalization of these concepts has led us to a reliance on their principles. The divine right of kings drew on God ordaining the monarch in question to rule over those in his kingdom. It’s difficult to embody the mindset, reasoning, and cultural inclinations certain people had at certain times in history to then understand how these concepts such as the divine right of kings made sense, but doing so is integral to understand how the concepts we hold dear might have been built on corrupt foundations. Too often we look upon the world with an underdeveloped *la mise en scene*.³ From this lacking perspective, we draw conclusions arbitrarily or assume an incorrect genesis of an idea or movement. In this chapter, I hope to provide a better understanding of Human Rights and demystify the concept.

Tracing this concept to its absolute roots we find Plato and Aristotle positing the existence of what is known as Natural Justice, which then gives rise to Natural Law, Natural Rights, and finally Human Rights. St. Thomas Aquinas is credited as the person who introduces Natural Law into the Christian cannon,⁴ prior to which the idea of natural rights was prominent within pagan or ‘atheist’ traditions. Binding Natural Law to a seat of power such as the Catholic church made these concepts spread like wildfire through the world and sealed their influence onto the future.

³ The content shown in the frame and the way it is shown and arranged: setting, lighting, costume, and staging.

⁴ Other notable theologians who are worthy of further inspection in terms of the development of Natural Law theory in relation to Christianity are Francisco Suarez, Richard Hooker, St. Augustine, and William of Ockham.

If Aristotle were erased from all the history books today, we could rediscover all of him in Aquinas. The fundamental principal of Natural Law theory is that good is to be done and evil is to be avoided.⁵ In a teleological argument one must understand what a certain objects or subject's end is; this end—or purpose—in turn helps 'complete' the object or subject. For Aristotle all things are striving towards an end, while for Aquinas we must strive towards God's intended function in order to be complete. God made the eye so that it would see, the stomach so that it would digest; it is "bad" when these things do not achieve their purpose and "good" when they do. This switch of the final cause from the end to the beginning of existence and its being vested with God's intentions erases the Aristotelian idea that there can be no universally true principals of right by which we can dictate what the good is. In this way, Aquinas sets the ground for a universal and programmatic application of Natural Law across cultures, contexts, and eternity. This eternal law guides our actions as Aquinas states we have a natural inclination to act in accordance with it.⁶ When we break from this inclination, we break from not only the Law but also the Good and Right as well.

⁵ "Hence this is the first precept of law, that 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided'. All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Christian Classics, 1948], p. 1351).

⁶ "Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, 'which nature has taught to all animals', such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p.1351).

For Aquinas there are five principal natural inclinations: the Good, that is, the inclination to what perfects and completes us; Self-Preservation, to seek food, shelter, clothing, and to avoid threats to our life; Sexual Union and the upbringing of our offspring; Knowing the Truth, that is, to be cognizant of the Eternal Law and bring it to completion; and Living in Society, which includes the inclination to friendship, and justice towards others. It is important to see that Aquinas does not think that Natural Law is imposed on us from some external source but is rather intertwined with the very design of our being which follows from God's creation.

This move here is vitally important for the operation Human Rights are to carry out, since they are a declaration that takes precedence over the laws of a nation while also instilling a qualifier as to who is considered a human. Additionally important in the framing of Natural Law is Aquinas stating, "Human law has the nature of law in so far as it partakes of right reason; and it is clear that, in this respect, it is derived from the eternal law. But in so far as it deviates from reason, it is called an unjust law, and has the nature, not of law but of violence."⁷ If a law out of line with the eternal law can be perceived not as a law but as a form of violence, then there is a plethora of implications that follow.

Fundamental in perceiving all humans as equals and further as containing an individual soul is understanding what exactly Descartes' dictum "I think therefore I am"⁸ implies and what baggage it carries with it. If our first item of knowledge is that we are things that think, what then follows? Well, in the tradition of radical skepticism Descartes tries to arrive at a valid rationality that qualifies his order of logical operations. Thus, if body did not follow this method, it would be cast out of the realm of rationality which qualifies us as humans. This being the classic

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p.1345.

⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 68.

example of mind-body dualism, Descartes has cut himself in two. The idea that the mind is separate from the body now reverberates through so many sentiments in modernity: thereby replacing the *soul* with the elusive *mind* and secularizing the concept of dualism.⁹

Enlightenment means to be guided by a light, and in the eighteenth century we put a filter over the light and changed the color from faith to science. With the breakdown of prior methods of rationality that relied on the existence of God, and an increasingly heated political climate, there needed to be someone to provide a reason why a state should exist. Thomas Hobbes dedicates 16 chapters in his *Leviathan* towards the understanding and construction of what human nature is through his adherence to the natural sciences. Breaking the human down to a mechanical apparatus starting with the organs, senses, and finally, reason, Hobbes attempts to bring self and world back onto the same plane again, and to overcome the superstition of soul and mind. Being a form of matter, humans can be understood like any other form of matter.

When in the business of reconstructing human nature from the ground up, you must identify a fundamental feature of the human. For Hobbes this is desire,¹⁰ and this proposal is what informs his infamous idea that life without laws would be a “war of each against each.”¹¹ Hobbes is a theorist of power, and that is clearly visible through the formulation of social contract theory. What better way to talk about the distribution of power than this? The social

⁹ Granted the project Descartes was concerned with was a quest to prove the existence of God, the echoes of his influence ring through the halls of the mind with a secular tone - functioning synonymously with the concept of the soul.

¹⁰ “To which end we are to consider, that the felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *finis ultimus* [utmost aim], nor *summum bonum* [greatest good], as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he, whose senses and imaginations are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object of man’s desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1996], p. 84).

¹¹ “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 84).

contract that Hobbes construes is a means of management for power dynamics between individuals and in turn the state. To give the monopoly on violence to the state, there needs to be a good reason, and the reason Hobbes gives is that if we don't relinquish our liberty to the state, then we would have "no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."¹² There would be no sovereign to settle disputes, to ensure security, and the list goes on. This dilemma is where Hobbes locates the necessity to create the state, through metaphorically signing our names onto the social contract.¹³ Hobbes the monarchist insists that we vest our Will in a sovereign being; that is in our general interest, and thus ensures safety to citizens through repeatable and predictable proceedings through its ability to maintain control over situations via its monopoly on violence.

Hobbes argues that our vesting of violence in the state is predated by our Will, which manifests itself in the form of a state system—for instance, democracy, or as Hobbes would see fit, monarchy. For power to operate swiftly and without contradiction this ability to use force needs to be vested in one body.¹⁴ Otherwise we would always be looking for "the" power that granted someone the authority to do something in the state's function. This movement is crucial, not only in a monarchical system but also a democratic one, in which there needs to be a separation of power so that "freedom" is a term of operation in the government, which only it

¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p.84.

¹³ It should be noted that the social contract does not "begin" in the Enlightenment; one can trace this theory back to Plato's *Crito* and to God's relationship to Adam in *The Bible*, this relationship being one that Locke will touch on soon.

¹⁴ "The rights, and consequences of sovereignty, are the same in both. His power cannot, without his consent, be transferred to another: he cannot forfeit it: he cannot be accused by any of his subjects, of injury: he cannot be punished by them: he is judge of what is necessary for peace; and judge of doctrines: he is sole legislator; and supreme judge of controversies; and of the times, and occasions of war, and peace: to him it belongeth to choose magistrates, counsellors, commanders, and all other officers, and ministers; and to determine of rewards, and punishments, honour, and order. The reasons whereof, are the same which are alleged in the precedent chapter, for the same rights, and consequences of sovereignty by institution" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p.132-133).

can grant. Without the necessary power and privilege to keep the people in awe¹⁵—that is, to have the general populous submit to the present state of things, whatever they may be, in a way that removes their ability to create new means and methods of existence—power cannot continue and necessitate its continuation, so that populous of state continue to buy into the current state of things.

After a brief intermission from the presence of God in the formulation of Human Rights, we return to Locke founding his theory of rights on the basis of humans being God’s property and being thus endowed with certain inalienable rights.¹⁶ This sentiment plays a heavy role in the American Declaration of Independence. As time progresses, though, we see this sentiment shift into what could be considered a more genuine or honest form being: God creates man, and the state creates citizens.

Up to this point we’ve been talking about Natural Law and Natural Rights, two concepts with a long history and many philosophical justifications attempting to prove their validity. Knowing this makes clear the move of intentionally basing human rights on no other philosophical underpinning than “inherent dignity.”¹⁷ When theorists do try to make arguments concerning Human Rights from a philosophical basis there is a typical inclination towards

¹⁵ “For a league being a connexion of men by covenants, if there be no power given to any one man or assembly (as in the condition of mere nature) to compel them to performance, is so long only valid, as there ariseth no just cause of distrust: and therefore leagues between commonwealths, over whom there is no human power established, to keep them all in awe, are not only lawful, but also profitable for the time they last” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p.157).

¹⁶ “For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business ; they are his property, whose workmanship they are... Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice to an offender, take away or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another” (John Locke, *Two Treatise on Government* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], p 102).

¹⁷ “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...” (United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights Preamble, 1948).

normative reconstructions of international law. This tendency exemplified in a theorist such as John Rawls.¹⁸ An immediate effort is made to ‘de-westernize’ the concept whenever it is brought under serious philosophical inquiry.

Human Rights seek to set a moral norm and a legal right at a national and international level. Arising in the aftermath of the Holocaust, they can be taken at best to keep the worst things from happening. There are no Natural Rights that are not also Human Rights, but there are Human Rights that are not Natural Rights. Further, these rights raise a number of questions about how they are to be upheld or enforced. It is easy to imagine a moral world but all at once this world seems disjunct with the reality we are presented with; this moral world would seem much too simplistic.

Are these rights innate? Do they “exist” without enforcement?

¹⁸ “Among the human rights are the right to life (to the means of subsistence and security); to liberty (to freedom from slavery, serfdom, and forced occupation, and to a sufficient measure of liberty of conscience to ensure freedom of religion and thought); to property (personal property); and to formal equality as expressed by the rules of natural justice (that is, that similar cases be treated similarly). Human rights, as thus understood, cannot be rejected as peculiarly liberal or special to the Western tradition. They are not politically parochial” (John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000], p. 65).

3 THE SCALES OF THE EARTH AND SKY

To make a more curious search into the rights of States, and duties of Subjects, it is necessary, (I say not to take them in sunder, but yet that) they be so considered, as if they were dissolved, (i.e.) that we rightly understand what the quality of human nature is, in what matters it is, in what not fit to make up a civil government, and how men must be agreed among themselves, that intend to grow up into a well-grounded State.

—Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, trans. Howard Warrender (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.32.

Human Rights operate through an ethics of equivalence. This ethic abstracts from the human it represents, claiming there is an essence embedded within them which is inalienable, unchanging over time, and the same for every human. These doctrines do not actually make people equal, rather, they allow people to be viewed in abstraction from everything that makes them the persons that they are. “In this way rights arise: recognized and guaranteed degrees of power.”¹⁹ The misrecognition of Rights as a means of emancipation through the political sphere reinforces the idea that these Rights are innate and grounded in a material reality rather than being the metaphysical abstraction that they are.

In order to make a judgment on the nature of a concept and gain understanding of the way it operates one must first determine the type of concept one is dealing with. For this I introduce what I will call “the scales of the *Earth* and *Sky*.”²⁰ These scales determine the ways in which we understand concepts to operate. Concepts that function through material grounding such as Hobbes’s organicism would weigh heavy on the side of the *Earth*. Concepts that operate

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. John Kennedy (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1911), p.98.

²⁰ This is like the ideas of “Cranes and Skyhooks,” by Daniel Dennett. Cranes represent ideas, concepts, and other thinking tools that are grounded in material reality. Skyhooks on the other hand do not present us with much if any grounding. Concepts that work via skyhooks are ones such as intelligent design.

through rationality such as Descartes's *cogito* would weigh heavy on the side of the *Sky*. This method serves to rectify misunderstandings others may have about the ways in which concepts function. Concepts of the *Sky* or the *Earth* are not more valid, correct, or valuable than the other, they are simply different. However, regardless of their difference the *Sky* and *Earth* are still interconnected and are not "separate" through the function of a binary. With the use of these scales, we find many such cases where people are under the assumption that a concept weighs heavy to the *Earth* when it is certainly a concept of the *Sky* and *vice versa*. This section serves as an examination of the consequences of this very misrecognition: specifically, the idea that Rights weigh on the side of the *Earth*, instead of the correct understanding that they weigh heavy on the side of the *Sky*.

As we know, when a concept is misrecognized, there are consequences. This results in either the reification or mythologization of a certain concept. The insistence that rights are grounded in material reality has led to the reification of said concept.

Humans don't have *rights*, they have *power*. The effort to construe reality to represent ourselves otherwise has been disastrous. If we concede the existence of rights as something natural, we accept erroneous ontological statements hidden behind what would seem to be an objectively good concept. To always keep an eye for the details, to always ask what is hidden, to further ask who hides it, are the questions we must ask when confronting human rights. Without this line of questioning, we have no way of understanding the "fundamental question of political philosophy: "Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?"²¹ Rights are a metaphysical abstraction that in turn frames the way in which we perceive reality to function.

²¹ Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 29.

Our sense of identity plays a key role in how we make sense of our place in the world. So, if being a human means having Rights, then that comes with a bit of baggage in need of inspection. As it is currently conceived, we are first and foremost Humans, and by virtue of this we are afforded certain “inalienable rights”²² that no government may trample upon due to their subservience to a transcendent authority. This transcendent authority is identified by Locke as God, with our being His creation, we are in a sense His property and as such owe Him a debt.²³ This relationship between Human and God has progressively shifted into Human and State while retaining a majority of the framework that Locke put forth. How does one change their relationship with God? We are no longer in relation with God in this way; we now look to the State. Instead of prayers that would change the world, we send in our votes, we protest in the streets, we fight in the marketplace of ideas.

Following such a logic would seem to imply that an increase in Rights would result in an increase in freedom and further limitation of the state, but the question that is yet to be asked in this formulation is: Who will enforce these Rights should they be violated? Further, what happens when the state violates my rights? What higher power holds it accountable? As previously stated, Rights are a concept of the *Sky*; their very existence requires a powerful enough entity to enforce them and punish those who violate the rights of others. This raises the question of how rights are to be enforced at an international level. Rights exist as means of management of power relation between individuals and the state.

Hobbes offers an insight that may prove beneficial. As mentioned in the epigram to this chapter, Hobbes wants to make certain the conception of human nature he formulates is correct,

²² Declaration of Independence: A Transcription. National Archives, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 8 June 2022, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.

²³ “For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master...” Locke, *John Two Treatise on Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p 102.

and that only by way of correctly understanding human nature can one begin to understand how to construct a government. Human Rights will always carry with them a conception of what human nature ought to be. This delimits in advance the extent of what is possible to not only conceptualize but also experience, for to know a thing's nature is to know its essence.

The belief in Human Rights carries with it ontological presuppositions, such as a dualistic approach to the universe. The world is split into two, with Humans being imbued with an essence that separates them from the rest of the universe. In this way we have seen the separation between "Human" and nature further solidifying the "Human," and by extension Human Rights as concepts of the *Sky*; for their grounding places them in a supernatural realm. This grounding is reflected in statements like: "humans are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights."²⁴ This claim further solidifies this essence-based conception of the Human. Our relationship to God posits our existence as one that is in debt to God, for we are created by God and are therefore his property.²⁵ With time, this, the ownership of the Human, has transferred over to the state level. We have changed the names, but the power dynamic remains the same. Thus, as we all carry with us dogma which once resided in the religious, now we agents of the state enforce, uphold, and reify the power relations that constitute our existence. Stratified relations between arbitrary levels of *citizenship* and participation in the program creates a circular condition in which our emancipation depends upon participation in the political sphere according to means of participation that the state provides.

The belief in Human Rights assumes a universality of values that are eternal and the same across the board for every human regardless of their context. They redirect *citizens* to

²⁴ Declaration of Independence: A Transcription. National Archives, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 8 June 2022, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.

²⁵ "For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master..." (John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], p. 102).

emancipate themselves by means of participation provided by the state, i.e., the ballot box, peaceful protests, and infographics. This changes the very way we view ourselves, and in turn the world around us. If we are to believe that humans have certain inalienable rights, then what are they based on? They could only be based on an ontologically spurious “essence,” something specific and integral to being a human. The concept therefore obscures what is really at play: namely, the state and its means of management for power relations.

4 EXISTENCE IS INNOCENT

From now on, man is *included* among the most unexpected and exciting lucky throws in the dice game of Heraclitus' "great child," be he called Zeus or chance; he gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 85.

The crux of Human Rights is the construction of the Human and the inscription of the term 'human' onto the body. To go beyond human rights is at once to go beyond our conventional understanding of the term "human." The question of the conditions and consequences of this action are paramount to the process. To experience possibilities beyond the current limitations is our task. What are the limitations that come with the term 'human', and further, what would life be like without the term being placed on the body?

Like the death of God,²⁶ the unraveling of the Human presents us with a great chance, an opportunity. While it is a chance to overcome and go beyond the Human, this is also an opportunity to repeat the same shortcomings under a different name. The only way past anything is through it, not around it or behind it, which would only return us to a previous mode of operations. Revolutions call many with unsavory opinions into the light, so let us first discuss what is *not* to be done with the transitional state to come.

²⁶ The death of God is best understood as an event. According to Nietzsche this event would take place during the enlightenment when scientific rationality triumphed over divination. After being dependent on God as a source of meaning for so long, now mankind would have to become what God was to them, forging their own meaning, morality, and explanations for existence. "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Press, 1974], p. 181).

Going beyond the concept of Human would appear to be a transhumanist goal.

“Transhumanism is, roughly, a philosophy advocating the use of technology to dramatically alter the human body and nature into a new, posthuman form.”²⁷ Transhumanists view the mind as separate from the body and the body as having inherent limitations that delimit the extent of what they can experience. The mind has infinite potential that is only restricted by its container, in this case the body. The mind, however, is nothing but an extension of the body.²⁸ Transhumanists, these so-called materialists, have identified in themselves a mind that can be eternal, separate, and limited by the body. No doubt, there will be many who think overcoming the human means going beyond the limitations of the body, and sadly these many will have merely repeated the mistakes represented by Cartesian subjectivity. Through their attempt to transcend the human form, they will have separated mind and body and have thus cut themselves in two, which is inconsistent with their materialist philosophy of mind. In a seemingly deliberate manner, they will have failed to address the very problems that they perceive to be locking them out of the future.

If the mind is an extension of the body, it would appear as though an improvement in the body would in turn improve the mind. However, in the case of the transhumanist goal, we aren't improving the body anymore; we are attempting to leave it.²⁹ The transhumanist reasons: “If there is infinite potential in the mind, then why stop at a cybernetic heart, arm, or leg? Why not

²⁷ Robert Johnson, "Infinite Monkeys: Nietzsche and the Cruel Optimism of Personal Immortality," MA Thesis, Georgia State University, 2022; p.1.

²⁸ “Thus, when men say that this or that physical action has its origin in the mind, which latter has dominion over the body, they are using words without meaning, or are confessing in specious phraseology that they are ignorant of the cause of the said action, and do not wonder at it” (Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes [London: George Bell & Sons, 1901], p.101).

²⁹ “I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes! They are mixers of poisons whether they know it or not” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Viking, 1966], p. 13).

continue all the way until we overcome the flesh?” As I argued in a previous section, the concept of Human Rights requires the conception of the Human, and at the heart of the Human lies an essence particular to each individual, yet eternal and universal. It is in this way that the transhumanist—unintentionally—replaces the humanist idea of the soul with the mind as the essence that separates the human from nature. Transhumanism will not take us *through* the human, it will only repeat what it has already meant to be human, but with different words, the soul for the mind, and the body.

Just as with the death of God, the overcoming of the human is an opportunity, a great chance to reconstruct what it means to experience, interpret, and enact an overarching system of reality. This is a great weight to bear, and often the recognition of a possibility so great is repressed to the point of non-awareness. The question is now, “what, if anything, is blocking us out of the future?” The future is becoming increasingly difficult to envision. In many ways we’ve lost control: we are no longer moving towards the future, rather the future is moving towards us. The path forward is not to withdraw from the process, but to go a step further.³⁰

Humans desire reasons, for death, for suffering, for the destiny that continually transcends their knowledge. In search of immaculate perception,³¹ from which humans can draw universal conclusions about existence as if they were the anthropocentric God they had presumably just killed, they now look for purification from their sinful nature to stop their suffering. This is a self-perpetuating cycle. As humans we carry with us original sin—through

³⁰ “It is a sign of one’s feeling of power and well-being how far one can acknowledge the terrifying and questionable character of things; and whether one needs some sort of ‘solution’ at the end” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage, 1967], p. 450).

³¹ “But this shall be your curse, you who are immaculate, you pure perceivers, that you shall never give birth, even if you lie broad and pregnant on the horizon” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.123).

our debt to God,³² or in a secular manner, with what Hobbes described as an inevitable war of all against all³³—and if we seek to avoid the mistaken trajectory of transhumanism, we need to understand existence more adequately. Original sin is inseparable from the traditional understanding of the Human; whether in the form of debt to God or society, our nature is shaped by this “original sin,” which governs the character in everyone and in turn everything.³⁴ If our understanding of the Human cannot be extricated from this concept, then humanism must also judge existence itself to be guilty, or sinful, by default. The entrenched belief that humanism is good reifies the Human, and with it these implications of existence and the delimitation of our potentialities in advance.

The indictment of existence, however, would require a judge who presides outside of existence, but since nothing can exist outside of existence there can be no such judgment cast and existence remains innocent. We construct maps of meaning through various systems, and one of the most powerful systems, the one in question here, is morality. Earthly life and morality seem to be in disharmony, for if they were not in disharmony, then earthy life would be moral. As I have previously argued, existence is inherently sinful and guilty when judged by the codes of the moral. Faced with the decision of which one we should remain faithful to; the answer is always earthly life. Unless we presuppose the existence of another world beyond this one, to

³² “For men being all the workmanship of the one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order and about his business, they are his property, whose Workmanship they are made to last during his, not another’s pleasure” (Locke, *Two Treatise On Government*, p. 271).

³³ “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man. For WAR, consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time, is to be considered in the nature of war; as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather, lieth not in a shower or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 84).

³⁴ When Adam and Eve committed the original sin they did not just change their nature, but the nature of existence as a whole (*Gen. 1:7-24 KJV*).

abandon earthly life is at once to abandon life itself. This form of life denial results in restriction of experience and expression. To go beyond the human, we do not need to abandon our morality; rather, we need to re-evaluate its purpose and ask who benefits when the current codes are followed.

The term Human has so far been nothing more than a means of management of power relations, imposed on the human psyche to reinforce the idea of a separation between mind and body. Control and management can occur without intention; however, we've seen the term Human used as a tool of control and limitation in a semi-deliberate manner. The response to this news should not be rage against the state, but rather a reflection on one's internalization of such a process and how this term now manifests itself in our lives. Otherwise, we will lack the courage of our convictions.

It should be noted that even if the Human is overcome, that does not mean the end of the Human. For example, we live in a capitalist society, yet there are elements of feudalism that remain, and so too will there remain human elements to whatever is to come next. Change carries the weight of the past into the present and gaining access to the future is a matter of shedding or seeing through the concepts that blind us now. The nature of reality is yet to be determined; we still don't know what a body can do.

What has it meant to be Human? What will it mean to go beyond the Human? Among other things, it will mean the loss of limits, or the realization that the limits we recognize aren't so natural after all. It has seemed impossible to recognize what the term Human has meant and implied, but hopefully we will develop a more honest lens on viewing the future. Invisible threads are the strongest ties, and until we start seeing the labyrinth of restraints, we will continue to be enveloped within them. Presented with this joyous and wonderful opportunity, we

must move with caution, since there are potential missteps along the path. The truth is we haven't seen anything yet.