

Human species as biopolitical concept

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I submit that the current situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic and its biopolitical consequences reveals something new in the ontological status of the human species which also involves an anthropological ‘revolution’.* This is something more than the fact that the combined tendencies called ‘globalisation’ (which, regardless of whether we assign them a recent or ancient origin, have clearly crossed a line at the end of the twentieth century) have resulted in relativising frontiers or distances, and subjected all human societies to a single system of economic interdependencies, thus realising something of the Marxian prediction (in the *German Ideology*) that every singular being would relate to every other, when the development of their ‘productive forces’ has reached ‘the stage of totality’.¹ It is also not the same as the fact that environmental consequences of global warming, of industrial waste and consumerist pollutions, plus the destruction of biodiversity are now affecting the whole planet and its populations. Of course the links of the Anthropocene with this type of pandemic do clearly exist. But what I want to discuss is something more directly linked to our self-definition as a ‘species’, working at a more elementary level.

‘Crossing the species barrier’, a formula used by epidemiologists to describe a zoonosis possibly transmitted from expatriated bats to human populations by some intermediary ‘domestic’ vectors, indicates the key determination: on the background of environmental disruption, the biological ‘event’ at the heart of the crisis connects the human species as such to other living species, which alternatively are contaminated and contaminants. But there is more: as we know, a virus is a *limit-case* in the classification of the living: it is not an organism or even a bacteria, but a sequence of nucleic acid surrounded by

proteins, which circulates between organisms and ‘infects’ cells equipped with a certain genotype in order to ‘replicate’ itself. Organisms are permanently ‘colonised’ by a great variety of viruses. The pathological effects (hence the *lethality*) are linked to the fact that a given species (in this case, the human) is not immunised against a virus with which it never had before a permanent contact. And the contact itself is due to the fact that individual organisms (e.g. humans) *meet* each other, i.e. *touch* their fellow humans, *breath* the same air, *live* in the same room or *use* the same objects. This generates an open process of *contagion*, or *dissemination*, which of course is more or less extended and rapid depending on the contagiousness of the virus and the intensity of the intercourse between the ‘vectors’, i.e. ‘us’ all, with whom viruses form a kind of *travelling association*.

What I submit is that, in this case, ‘humankind’ or the human ‘species’ as an ensemble, in its great majority if not in its totality, becomes materially *unified* in a ‘passive’ manner. Borrowing a formula from Husserl and Deleuze, I am tempted to speak here of a ‘passive synthesis’ of the human species.² This is a phenomenon of *trans-individuation* of the human, whose specific conditions lie both at the *pre-individual* level of the pathogenic circulation of viruses, which connect bodies and cross every frontier despite the prophylactic obstacles, and at the *supra-individual* level, formed by the ‘global’ system of production and communications, the *institutional* circulation of persons and things.³ But to describe the emergence of the ‘specific transindividual’ as construction of an ontological unity, even if negatively linked to illness and death, would be utterly insufficient. It is equally important to indicate that, right away, the process of unification is also a process of *radical divisions*,

* A previous version of this article was given as a lecture at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) of Kingston University, London, on Thursday 25 February 2021.

which I propose to call ‘anthropological fractures’, because they generate rifts and oppose the human to the other human within what we may call their common ‘species-being’ (*Gattungswesen*), an expression borrowed from Feuerbach and the young Marx.⁴ This is of course the political dimension that official discourses carefully put aside, or minimise, when they refer to the ‘universal’ character of the problems created by the pandemic and the crisis, invoking common interests of mankind and the necessity of addressing them in a collective manner, arguing that ‘we are all in the same boat’.

It is very important to understand here that the generic unity and the radical division are not independent determinations, they form a unity of opposites in the dialectical sense. The process of unification *intensifies* and *generalises* the fractures, while the fractures emerge as the *concrete modality* in which the unity is realised. Of course this is extremely unstable, both morally and politically. A striking feature of the situation is the *differential vulnerability* of humans with respect to the contamination, mainly related to their various ‘anthropological differences’ (of race, gender, age, pre-existing pathologies) which intersect with class differences (in terms of jobs, revenues, precariousness, housing, access to medical services, etc.) and global geographic inequalities inherited from the history of colonisation. These differences become actual *cracks*, or they tend to fracture the species into biopolitical ‘quasi-races’, and they are linked to discriminations when it comes to erecting protections against the contagion or to distribute treatments. But the discriminations do not cancel the unification process, in particular because they do not really *block the contagion*, the transindividual dissemination of the pathogenic element.

Nothing makes this more palpable (and more unacceptable) than the ‘cosmopolitical’ issue of the distribution of vaccines *equally and globally*, which has been raised by the Director of the World Health Organisation, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has repeatedly requested that the vaccines now available be quickly transformed into ‘generic’ drugs, which could be produced everywhere under strict biological control, but completely liberated from the restriction of private licenses (as was partially reached in the treatment of AIDS).⁵ There is of course no possibility that this becomes the case any time soon, if there is no mass mo-

bilisation to support it, because of the huge financial interests of pharmaceutical corporations and the fierce geopolitical competition about vaccines among powerful states, East and West. The official motto of the WHO, ‘One World, One Health’, which we could complete as ‘One World, One Health, One Species’, appears to us as the symbol of this contradiction.

Let me now come to a more specific question, namely the ‘epistemological’ issue of the Human Species as a concept which is undergoing a theoretical *mutation*. That this mutation is politically determined and has political implications (cosmopolitical, biopolitical) is not something to be just added at the end, it is coextensive with the whole examination. I will discuss four successive points (incompletely, of course): 1) The traditional dilemma of anthropological philosophy; 2) The ‘perspectivist’ alternative; 3) Towards a relational understanding of the species-production; 4) Which ‘synthesis’ of History and Evolution are we looking for?

The traditional dilemma of anthropological philosophy

I begin with the dilemma of anthropology. Antithetic orientations are of course as old as the anthropological discourse itself (I am speaking of the Western tradition), and they exist independent of whether ‘anthropology’ is considered from a philosophical, theological or scientific point of view. Certain dualisms seem to persist through these transformations. It is interesting, for instance, to see that Tim Ingold, the eminent British anthropologist, in his introductory essay called ‘Humanity and Animality’ to the *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, is eager to explain that the single term *species* applied to the human has led to a disastrous confusion between the study of *Homo sapiens*, as an animal species among others (admittedly with unique forms of behaviour), and the study of the *human condition* opposed to animality, with the diversity of its cultures.⁶ The name ‘human’ seems to be located at the intersection of two multiplicities, one external or relational, the other intrinsic and typological. But the *singular collective* that it refers to ought not to be identified using the same terminology ... Applying the rules of logical clarification, we should accordingly distinguish *species* from *condition*, the specificity from the diversity.

I believe that it is more interesting to set up against one another the two great discourses between which the debates about philosophical anthropology found themselves divided (especially in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century), as a kind of ‘point of heresy’. I will call the first the ‘Kantian’ discourse because its main orientations derive from the discovery of what, in *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault would later call the ‘empirical-transcendental doublet’.⁷ Conversely, the other discourse derives its postulates from the Darwinian revolution (even if, as we know, some important elements of the modern theory of evolution came from previous naturalists, such as Buffon, choosing ‘inter-fecundity’ as a criterion of the species level, and the understanding of the process of ‘speciation’ in terms of variation and natural selection only became coherent after the fusion of Darwinism with Mendelian genetics).



Both discourses involve a definition of the *human species*, although from antithetical points of view. Some problems of terminology ought to be discussed here. Historians of ideas and some anthropologists assume that in every culture there is a ‘vulgar’ (or common) idea of species, expressed by different words, and a ‘scientific’

or ‘theoretical’ one, which must evolve with the progress of knowledge. But this is complicated by the fact that different languages always use several terms to express the unity or uniqueness of mankind, which are never distributed in the same manner. For example, it would be impossible to transfer the common English expression ‘the human race’ (already used in the seventeenth century)⁸ into French, but there are some affinities with the German *das menschliche Geschlecht* (sometimes used by Kant, instead of *die menschliche Gattung*, which is more frequent, and is dominant today in this tradition, for example in Habermas), although it also often means what we call ‘sex’ ...

It is certainly possible to say that the Kantian point of view is *idealistic*, since Kant orientates philosophy, history and ‘cosmopolitics’ towards an *Idea of Man* (*Idee des Menschen/der Menschheit*), whereas Darwin illustrates a *naturalistic* point of view, incorporating the human in a *genealogy* entirely immanent to the transformations of living organisms (‘animals’) which he terms a ‘descent’ (thus causing what Freud will call a ‘narcissistic blow’ to our sense of uniqueness and predestination). This is true of course, but it is important to immediately add another determination. While both referring to the human as *species*, they characterise the ‘species-being’ in an antithetical manner: in Kant the human species is not only unique in its kind, it *coincides* with a kind, or it is its own ‘kind’ (*Gattung*, ‘genre’), whereas for Darwin the human is a species like any others, but it has a unique way of being divided into varieties or races.⁹

From the Kantian point of view, which preserves the legacy of Cicero’s *societas generis humani*, the species is a *community*, albeit a ‘virtual’ or ‘ideal’ one (but which must be conscious of itself, or *represented* to its members). From the Darwinian point of view, the species is a *population* which can be divided into *subpopulations*, because its members need to *adapt* to heterogeneous environments and transfer their adaptation to the next generations (which the modern Darwinism will explain through the replication of the genetic material through sexual reproduction, thus creating within the population over time a ‘genetic pool’). On both sides of our ‘point of heresy’, the *One* and the *Multiple* of the human become articulated in an antithetical manner.

From a Kantian point of view, the One is a transcendental *norm* (or a normative idea), which imposes on each

subject (or conscience) an equal respect for all the other humans qua *persons* or *rational beings*, thus making it possible (or, rather, mandatory) to view them as *humans alike*. All the individual differences and what Kant calls the ‘characters’, classifying the humans in types and groups, particularly racial, ethnic and sexual, are relegated to the realm of the *empirical*, which means that they must become neutralised or abstracted from in the formation of the moral community. But in fact this is not exactly true: for it would be a norm without effectivity, especially in history and legislation. The real articulation is a *conflictual process*, a ‘pragmatic’ subsumption of the empirical differences under the normative idea, which is essentially an *educational process* – called ‘culture’, or elsewhere more dialectically the ‘unsociable sociability’ – taking place at the level of the individual and the species. Here things become a little tricky, because we know (in particular through recent critical work, done by Spivak and others) that in this process the empirical differences are converted into *unequal capacities to realise the proper human*, and even leaves the possibility that some racially inferior humans will never be educated, i.e. will never prove able to *recognise* the idea of the community to which they should belong ...¹⁰

Things are no less complex from the Darwinian and post-Darwinian point of view, where, as I said, the key category is not *community* but *population*, which seems to be a mere empirical principle of gathering, with statistical connotations. This is not the case, in fact, because there is an immanent ‘demographic’ connection between the One and its underlying Multiplicity, which is provided by the *genealogical link*, therefore a temporal continuity or *continuation*: the long past (called ‘descent’ or ‘origin’, in other terms the result of cumulated variations in the ‘type’ which have been ‘selected’) is articulated with the uncertain future (which we can call reproduction or heredity), whereas the present – which in a sense is the ‘species’ itself, or, as contemporary biologists would prefer to say, the moment of *speciation*, is being suspended between the *production* and the *transformation* of the type – a point of equilibrium stretched over time, as it were. Ideally at least, the human qua species is a moment of equilibrium between the *pre-human* revealed by palaeontology and the unknown *post-human*. To this scheme of temporality, there is a crucial spatial or territorial counterpart, since the condition for variations to

become concentrated and exclusively reproducible (creating a ‘species frontier’, as the great post-Darwinian theorist Ernst Mayr will write) is that a subpopulation is *isolated* within a *closed* territory or habitat, or excluded from other territories.¹¹ I will have to return to this question of the spatial isolation (or non-isolation) because it is bound to play a crucial role in any attempt at rethinking the question of speciation in *relational* terms (both to the environment and to other species).

Before I leave this comparison, I want to add a philosophical remark. Although its other side is the ‘empirical’ diversity that needs to be subsumed in a ‘cultural’ process, the Kantian idea is remarkable for its *self-referential* logic, which means that the (normative) ‘idea’ is not projected from outside. In that sense the Kantian problematic is completely *secularised*, there is no need (at least no visible need) of a Creator.¹² In other terms, the ‘absolute’ element without which there is no community of the humans is one that they *find in themselves* through the activity of their reason. However it remains an absolute, therefore an abstraction. This problematic perfectly illustrates a concept of the ‘human essence’ (*menschliches Wesen*) as it is criticised by Marx in the 6th Thesis on Feuerbach: ‘an abstraction *inhabiting* each and every individual’, more precisely each and every individual’s *representation of the common*.¹³ This could be considered a weakness, especially if we take everything that Marx doesn’t like as an absurdity ... But it is an idea not so easy to bypass from an *ethical* point of view, especially if we try and associate a notion of ‘*generic*’ *responsibility* towards the future of the community, or its excluded parts, with our notion of humanity. This is why we find a trace of the Kantian point of view, more insistent than ever, in contemporary ethics which attach the moral imperative to the respect for *the life of others*, or to the valorisation of their ‘vulnerability’. But then the question will arise whether and why this valorisation should remain *tautologically* enclosed within the ‘frontiers’ of the *human species*, and not extend to other beings? This of course has to do with the fact that, as I said, for Kant the human is the only species that *coincides with its own kind* by virtue of its morality and rationality. To cross the frontier, one has to substitute rationality and morality with other criteria of *personhood* (which is very much what contemporary animalists try to do).

Paradoxically, the trace of theology is perhaps more

visible in Darwin, although it is translated in the ‘materialist’ terms of the *production of the species* that, while emerging from the long history of natural selection, has *acquired unique characters*, in particular intellectual and technical capacities which, for Darwin, are already there in ‘savages’ and culminate in ‘civilisation’, whereas our *emotional* dispositions according to him are largely inherited from the ‘lower animals’. Darwin does not speak of the *centrality* of man in nature, as the Bible used to, but he writes that ‘man in the rudest state in which he now exists is *the most dominant animal* that has ever appeared on this earth’.¹⁴ A materialist equivalent of the idea of creation therefore is the question of the ‘production’ of these ‘intellectual faculties’ and ‘social habits’ whose ‘supreme importance’ has been ‘proven by the final arbitration of the battle for life.’¹⁵ And it is on this point that the post-Darwinians (until today) offer the most diverse combinations of discontinuity within continuity, or chance within determinism ...

The ‘perspectivist’ alternative from the Amazonas

Before I move to what I perceive to be a tendency of contemporary ecology to displace the question of the species in the direction of a superior ensemble, where ideas of uniqueness and frontiers are reformulated, I want to take a few moments to describe a different kind of alternative emerging from within the anthropological tradition in its postcolonial and poststructuralist orientation, which calls itself the *perspectivist* problematic. I find it crucial as a mediation towards overcoming the anthropocentric teleology and the metaphysics of the species-being which institutes a *mirror-effect* between the singular individual and the singular collective, that we can read both in Kant and Darwin, albeit in inverted form. A long discussion would be necessary, because many authors participate in this movement. The most interesting in my opinion are not Descola or Latour, nor even Haraway, but the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.¹⁶ With other contemporary authors, de Castro shares the idea that the dualism of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ is a purely Western, or Eurocentric idea, which has been imposed on other civilisations through the colonial conquests. It entails both the idea that the human species has ‘extracted’ itself from its participation in ex-

changes (which can be conflictual, even predatory, but involve reciprocity) with other living species, and the idea that all non-human beings can be used for the satisfaction of human needs without limits (provided it be done in a wise, i.e. calculated or rational manner). He therefore proposes a thought experiment, in which the ‘human perspective’ on the non-humans is substituted, or confronted with a ‘non-human perspective’ on the humans, particularly a perspective of the *wild species* for whom autochthonous peoples are co-habitants of the same environment.



Keep in mind that this proposal has a political counterpart, for example in the discourse of Native Americans in the Amazonas, who argue that rivers, mountains, forests are ‘persons’, not only out of ‘animist’ convictions, but in order to oppose their ‘natural right’ to the destructive effects of capitalism, in a reversal of the Marxian ‘fetishism’, where nature is made of pure ‘things’, ready for exploitation and commodification.¹⁷ I am interested here in the way in which Viveiros de Castro makes use of the powers of *fiction*. He himself approvingly refers to the *myths* of Indian tribes, as transmitted and glossed by shamans, which narrate and set up the exchange of places between the various ‘species’: we are distinctly humans but also animals (e.g. predators and prey) in the eyes and the mind of the Jaguar or the Snake. There is here a clear influence of the Deleuzian and Kafkaesque motto of ‘becoming other’ through metamorphoses. This seems to me to be fairly different from the typologies of alternative ‘cosmologies’ proposed by other authors, which are in fact completely positivist, comparing ‘cultures’ as formal systems. De Castro doesn’t claim to be ‘multiculturalist’ but ‘multinaturalist’. In de Castro, the recourse to fiction

(and myth) is a new moment of what Levi-Strauss had called *le regard éloigné*, or the ‘view from afar’, except that this ‘afar’ need not be measured in geographical or cultural distance, it is essentially a question of including in our self-reflection as humans, or as a human species, an *imaginary* critique of the *illusion* of uniqueness that is inherent in the classical anthropologies, or to understand that uniqueness not in terms of its own image, but in terms of its relations to other natural beings, through a kind of ‘eidetic variation’.¹⁸ Let us try and see how this could be applied to the interpretation of certain recent trends in the understanding of evolution.

Towards a relational understanding of the species-production

From this vantage point, I suggest that we can try and return to the question of what we call ‘human species’, not in self-referential terms (even if ‘located’ in a broad spatial-temporal framework) but in terms of its intrinsic relationality to others and the transformations or evolution of these relations. Such a perspective is clearly involved in the form in which recent ecology has tended to react to the very idea of evolution, by suggesting that *what evolves*, or becomes transformed into different types that form relatively stable (through genetic reproduction) and relatively homogeneous (through isolation) collectivities is not a *single species* (or population with specific characters, sharing a ‘genetic pool’), but a *system* or a *complex* which always includes a multiplicity of living forms inhabiting the same environment (with different degrees of ‘closure’) and contributing to the shaping of this environment through their ‘activity’ (the effects of their metabolism and behaviour). In other terms, the support of evolution, its *hypokeimenon*, is not and cannot be a single species, it must be the relation itself between species in its unstable composition – I am tempted to say *à la Marx* the ‘ensemble of ecological relations’, which includes their ‘world’ and their interaction with that world. Every evolution in that sense is a ‘co-evolution’, and every co-evolution is a reciprocal transformation or a *mutual ‘adaptation’* of the organisms and their ‘milieu’ (which, following Canguilhem, I see no difficulty in calling ‘dialectical’).¹⁹

Once again, we have to evoke some difficulties of terminology and translation which can also become con-

ceptual resources. Where the English practically has a single term, ‘environment’, the French or the German use at least two. I used on purpose the French category ‘milieu’ – supposedly coined in its biological meaning by Buffon out of an analogy with Newtonian physics – rather than the German category *Umwelt* (different from *Umgebung*) because, although the idea of the ‘milieu’ clearly involves a teleological correspondence between needs and resources, or activities and effects which can be destructive or regulating, and therefore a dilemma of *adaptation and inadaptation* (which in a sense is biological ‘life’ itself, but can be extended to ‘social life’), it does not involve *intentionality*, or the hermeneutic circularity of defining the *Umwelt* through its *meaning for* the organism (essentially the individual organism, and practically the ‘superior’ animal or vegetal organism). This can be disputed of course. In any case, what I have in mind is the fact that evolutionary theory no longer locates ‘adaptation’ (in a utilitarian manner) on the side of the living forms, with the ‘environment’ playing the role of the deterministic constraint which continuously imposes the ‘battle for life’, eliminating the ‘inadapted’ unless they change or leave room for others, but *also* on the side of the environment (which in large part is made of other living beings). The relationship must be *symmetrised*, or it must be understood permanently from a ‘double perspective’ (at least).

As a consequence, the differential of adaptation-inadaptation is taking place in ecosystems which can be ordered hierarchically along the continuous line of successive inclusions: from the *niche* (which is usually defined for a single species, or even variety, e.g. the European wildcat (*felis silvestris*) or the common rat (*rattus rattus*), to the *habitat* where multiple species (cats and rats) coexist, to the *milieu* where certain conditions for life are regulated (e.g. the savannah, or the rain-forest), to the *environment* proper, which includes the physical and geological determinations making life possible, to the *planet*, which is the environment of environments. When we discuss evolutionary processes at this final level, the category *history* (history of life, history of the earth) needs to be introduced, but I will return to this in a minute.

Before I switch to the specific question of the human as a product of its relation to its own milieu, allow me another quick remark. I invoke the category ‘co-

evolution', but there are multiple forms and degrees of co-evolution, some in which genetic or phenotypic transformations are directly correlative, because certain living species live in symbiosis, others in which the transformations are mediately produced, because species are in a relationship of predation, of mutual support in their reproductive process (Deleuze, as we know, was fascinated by the 'coupling' of the wasp and the orchid, which for him is like an unconscious love affair),²⁰ others in which the transformations involve changes in the rates of growth or extinction of populations. Ecologists and socio-biologists frequently use the term *community* to describe the system of interdependencies between species or forms of life which subsist in the same habitat, or whose regulated interdependency *reproduces* the possibilities ('services') of their environment. They also use the terms *hierarchy* and *domination* – with clear risks of anthropomorphic projection – to describe the fact that the relations of 'exchange' between species are always *dis-symmetric*, like relations of *power*: not only because some organisms are used by others in the great cycle that leads from photosynthesis to consumption of vegetables and animals to decomposition and decay, but because a 'community' in a given milieu involves different processes of 'invasion', 'competition' and, notably, 'extinction'. The history of life in the evolutionary process is the history of productions, or speciations, and extinctions through direct or indirect elimination. The question becomes now: is it possible to extend these categories, with their metaphoric resonances, to the level of the planet, or the environment of environments, and what would be the possible articulation with the *singular* character of the 'domination' of the human species in the history of life, even if we perceive it from a *non-anthropocentric* point of view?

Which 'synthesis' of History and Evolution are we looking for?

As we remember, Darwin called the human 'the most dominant animal', which barely conceals an idea of sovereignty (the species that *dominates all other dominants* themselves), but the kind of 'domination' we have to discuss now is more ambivalent, since it includes the possibility that this domination has *simultaneous effects* of construction and destruction. What I have in mind

is the fact that – over something like 70,000 or 100,000 years – the humans (for the sake of simplicity let's call them the human species, *homo sapiens sapiens*), eliminating or mixing with some other humans, have expanded their 'habitat' from a limited region in the African high plains to the whole planet, so that in fact there is practically no *particular milieu* for the human species, or there is a *quasi-universal milieu*: only very few regions in the globe today are not 'inhabited', and in fact they are all *exploited*, with global warming helping to cross the last frontiers.

If we remember Ernst Mayr's theory of territorial isolation as a condition for the emergence of new species and his concept of the 'species frontier', we may suggest the following model, which is paradoxical only in appearance: through the progressive displacement and removal of frontiers, the human species has generated for itself (and, as a consequence, also for many others) a process of *de-isolation* (of course there have been more complex cycles of partial isolation and reconvening) which makes it impossible for the species to *evolve* in the traditional sense, or along the purely Darwinian mechanism of variation plus natural selection. As the human species 'colonised' the planet and therefore, in the end, produced a global environment where its own activities (agricultural, industrial) *modify the conditions of variation and selection for all other species*, which also before our eyes leads to a massive *extinction* of other species (called by Elizabeth Kolbert and others the 'sixth mass extinction in the history of life'),²¹ the 'domination' of the human (or the 'becoming dominant' of the human as a species in the totality of environments) may be said to have transformed not the 'laws' of evolution, but certainly its *conditions*, and therefore its *tendencies*. I would also risk the formulation, which returns us to the immediate present: the human species has practically 'crossed' every species barrier technically or biologically, but, in 'doing' this – if it is a 'deed' – it has created the conditions for its *own 'barrier' as a species* to be crossed by certain organisms or quasi-organisms (such as viruses), erecting protections which are continuously got around (or, in the terminology of Jacques Derrida and Roberto Esposito, creating immunities which become auto-immunities).²²

Apparently, 'dominance' in the ecological sense is itself symmetric, or it is intrinsically fragile and ambivalent in the long run. However, is it satisfactory to say

that the human species has made it possible for itself *not to evolve*? Shouldn't we rather change our perspective and consider the question from the relational angle of mutual adaptation? What I have described in broad terms is a process of transformation of the world, which can be called a *colonisation* (and I am fully aware of the problems which this category will raise when we compare it to the *historical and political* meaning of the idea of colonisation). I have described the human species as the *colonising species* in the co-evolution of life and environment. How to imagine that this would not affect the definition of the human *as a species* in return? It would be a complete non-sense with respect to our premises ... In fact, the human species is not only colonising territories and using their resources in multiple manners which are unequally creative or destructive, it is *colonising itself*, or *self-colonising*, both extensively in terms of including human populations within the realm of its expansions (a process which culminates in the 'proper' colonisation of the modern era, driven by capitalism and other interests or 'missions'), and intensively in the form of the permanent destruction and reconstruction of its own habitats everywhere (think of Habermas's 'colonisation of the life world').²³ But this consideration leads to a more general, and also more problematic one: namely the idea that we cannot circumscribe our understanding of the idea of speciation and evolution as 'production' of a species-type with the limited criterion of a genetic determination (and genetic material or 'pool'), however important this is (all the more when it becomes possible to *technically* modify the genetic material for medical or eugenic purposes). In the case of the human, and as a direct counterpart to its 'domination' of the universal milieu, there is a kind of *reflexive* or *endogenous* evolution, which at the same time *extracts* the human from the 'community' of which it is part, and provides it with increasingly more efficient means of transformation – which however are never able to anticipate and master their own consequences. This is not a zero-sum game, in which nature becomes 'weaker' and 'subservient' as man, its alleged 'master and possessor', has become stronger and 'dominant'. As Spinoza had already written in the single axiom of his *Ethics*, part IV: 'There is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed';

which we could translate as: 'the stronger or more effective man becomes in nature, the stronger and even more effective nature proves to be.'²⁴

More speculatively: as we try and understand what kind of *new species* the human has become as a consequence of its own history, we must also elaborate a *new concept of species*. This makes us think of what is commonly called the 'reversing effect of culture' on 'nature' itself in the case of man, or the emergence of a 'second nature' which substitutes the 'first' (not only for the human, but for its others as well). This is a long and fascinating history of philosophical ideas indeed ... However I would prefer to follow the more concrete path already indicated with the idea of the colonising and self-colonising species. This is certainly a decisive criterion, but probably not the only one, or one that does not operate *alone*.

In my recent readings and ruminations, I have come to the idea that two other characteristics are equally important, and complementary. Firstly, there is the character of *domestication*, because the humans are the only 'domesticating' and 'self-domesticating' species, thus introducing *among the living beings* an increasingly decisive cleavage between two categories: the 'wild', or simply *non-domesticated* species, and the 'companion species' (as Donna Haraway calls them),²⁵ i.e. the domesticated species in various manners and enclosures, creating for themselves a 'niche' among their domestic animals. And then there is the character of the *artificialisation* of life, because the human is the only species which, extracting materials and instruments from its own environment, is able to create a complete system of *prosthetic supplements* without which no individual can exist – not even one minute – between birth and death, 'externalising' the biological, intellectual, affective conditions of its own life, or developing an 'external body': what Bernard Stiegler, developing suggestions from the great prehistorian and archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan, had called 'exosomatisation'.²⁶

While colonisation and self-colonisation 'territorialise' the human species in a process of determined negation of all pre-existing territorial boundaries, domestication and self-domestication decisively *displace the frontier* between the human and the non-human, making it possible for the humans to live and inhabit more or less symbiotically among an increasing proportion of non-

humans (animals or plants), but also installing these non-humans *on the side of the human* in the great divide (we might ask after De Castro what certainly makes the perception of humans as animals so widely different for a jaguar and a milking cow?), until domestication itself is superseded by industrial agriculture and the biochemical production of food. And *artificialisation* is an extremely powerful vector of *transindividuality*, since the 'external body' is never purely personal, or individual, it is made of connected systems, shared by many at the same time. Marx had a glimpse of that with his 'general intellect'.²⁷ All these determinations – colonisation, domestication, artificialisation – are of course aspects of what used to be called 'socialisation', seen from an evolutionary standpoint. Which calls for a careful discussion.

Only now therefore have I arrived at the point where I could raise my last questions, but I am already beyond the limits of time. I will therefore content myself with *naming* the two questions which are inevitable. In fact they are correlative.

The first is the following: how do we articulate the concepts of *evolution* and *history*? Clearly, there is a question of regimes of temporality here as well as of ontological support. In his celebrated essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses* from 2009, Dipesh Chakrabarty has proposed to draw the consequences of the 'Anthropocene' by *merging* or re-connecting geological time and social time, which he considers two varieties of history.²⁸ The problem I want to raise now with respect to 'evolution' and 'history' is similar, perhaps it is even another dimension of the same, but it raises quite different questions and aporias. I see it as an absolute precondition for the investigation of the problem that we resolutely abandon every anthropocentrism on the side of evolution and we completely eliminate 'evolutionism' on the side of history (which was certainly not the case in any of the great philosophies of history, including Marxism). We need to construct a reciprocity, understand what kind of evolution in the anthropological sense is taking place *within history*, how historical processes *transform the species-being*, but also conversely what kind of history has *modified the course of evolution*, both for man and for the other components of the 'living community'.

At this point the question of capitalism arises, inevitably. I am completely aware of the fact that my readers here (as on some previous occasions) could be very sur-

prised. They want to ask: what role does capitalism play in your description of the transformation of the environment and the abolition of species barriers (or frontiers)? And perhaps: how dare you inscribe processes of artificialisation, domestication, and above all colonisation, in a process of historical evolution whose 'subject', both patient and agent, would be this 'abstraction', the human species, never mentioning or apparently marginalising the *capitalist* determination of this process?

My tentative answer is twofold. First, *this is not an abstraction*, this is the *concrete* process of the *becoming species* of the human, its *Gattungswerden*, which began long before capitalism, although we observe its completion, or 'passive synthesis', only now. Second, in this history, capitalism is not marginal, or secondary, far from it. The reference to capitalism is absolutely crucial if we want to avoid the illusion of retrospective *necessity* (precisely what an evolutionist view of capitalism did not escape). Capitalism did not only change the course of history, it *changed the course of evolution*. If the emergence of the human species is the 'catastrophe', in the topological sense,²⁹ within the evolution of life and the planet, capitalism is the 'catastrophe' within this catastrophe: it is the social and economic mutation that dramatically *accelerates* and probably *bifurcates* within the processes of colonisation, domestication and artificialisation. The anthropology of *homo capitalisticus* is certainly not inexistent, but barely sufficient already to completely understand our present. It should be considered one of our main philosophical tasks.

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Notes

1. Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels and Moses Hess), *The German Ideology* (1845; first publication 1930): 'Thus things have now come to such a pass that the individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity, but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence. This appropriation is first determined by the object to be appropriated, the productive forces, which have been developed to a totality and which only exist within a universal intercourse. From this aspect alone, therefore, this appropriation must have a universal character corresponding to the productive forces and the intercourse.' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/>

works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm.

2. In the philosophy of Edmund Husserl a 'passive synthesis' (of the transcendental subject) is a process of cultural experience without reflection or intention that 'accumulates' meanings preparing the emergence of consciousness (see *Cartesian Meditations*, 1929, IV). Deleuze adopted the notion to give it a vast application in *Difference and Repetition* (1969) where it connotes, in particular, the 'correspondences' between series or multiplicities which make an experience of time possible.

3. The concept 'transindividual' was introduced in the mid-twentieth century by Jacques Lacan, Lucien Goldman, and especially Gilbert Simondon. I have used it to relate a group of philosophers who simultaneously reject 'individualism' and 'holism' in philosophy and politics (Spinoza, Marx, Freud). See my book *Spinoza, the Transindividual*, trans. Mark G. E. Kelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020); also Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality* (Leiden: Brill 2016).

4. See Luca Basso: *Marx and Singularity. From the Early Writings to the Grundrisse*, trans. Arianna Bove (Leiden: Brill 2012), ch. 1.

5. See his declarations: Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, 'Vaccine Nationalism Harms Everyone and Protects No One', *Foreign Policy*, 2 February 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/02/vaccine-nationalism-harms-everyone-and-protects-no-one>.

6. Tim Ingold, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); see my commentary 'Foucault's Point of Heresy: "Quasi-Transcendentals" and the Transdisciplinary Function of the Episteme', *Theory, Culture & Society* 32:5-6 (2015), 45–77.

8. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following example: 'Whatever the cause of our different colour be, I'm sure we're all of human Race.' (C. Gildon *Post-boy rob'd of his Mail* l. xlv. 148 (1692)) in 'human, adj. and n.' OED online. September 2021, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89262>

9. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1906).

10. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999). I am also relying on the recent PhD thesis by Marie Louise Krogh at Kingston University: *Territory and Temporality: The Geopolitical Imaginary of German Philosophies of History* (2020).

11. Ernst Mayr, *Population, Species and Evolution* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1970).

12. As we know in Kant 'God' becomes a moral idea (which he calls a 'postulate of practical reason'), located not at the *origin* but at the (hypothetic) *end* of history.

13. See my commentary 'From Philosophical Anthropology to Social Ontology and Back: What to Do with Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach?', *Postmodern Culture* 22:3 (2012).

14. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Part I, chapter II. On the intrinsic tension between secularism and theology in Darwin's philosophy (therefore scientific thinking), see Dominique Lecourt, *L'Amérique entre la Bible et Darwin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992).

15. Ibid.

16. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: Univocal 2014); see also 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4:3 (1998).

17. See Ailton Krenak, *Idées pour retarder la fin du monde*, postface by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, trans. Julien Pallotta (Bellévaux: Editions Dehors 2020).

18. Claude Lévi Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985).

19. Georges Canguilhem, 'Le vivant et son milieu', in *La connaissance de la vie*, 2nd edition (Paris: Vrin, 1965); *Knowledge of Life*, eds. Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

20. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia II*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987), ch 10.

21. Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015).

22. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2011).

23. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol.2 : Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason*, trans. Thomas MacCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

24. See Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

25. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

26. Bernard Stiegler & The Collectif Internatio, eds, *Bifurquer. Il n'y a pas d'alternative* (Paris: les Liens qui libèrent, 2020); see also <https://www.lesauterhin.eu/a-propos-de-bifurquer-2-anthropocene-exosomatization-et-neguentropie/>

27. Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus. (London: Penguin Books & New Left Review, 1973), Notebook VII, 'Fixed capital and circulating capital as two particular kinds of capital. Fixed capital and continuity of the production process. – Machinery and living labour. (Business of inventing)', <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/-works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.htm>

28. Now included and expanded in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

29. 'Topological' refers here to the mathematical 'theory of catastrophes'. See René Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis*, trans. David H. Fowler (Reading, MA: W. A. Benjamin, 1975).