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Posthuman Security

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The title of this intervention, 'Posthuman security', should be understood in distinction from 'post-human security'. I do not intend to mark or describe the end or the aftermath of some historical era in which 'human security' in its conventional use would no longer play a role. It is not because such a claim could not – or should not – be made. There are indeed many voices that claim that such a need is at hand, and that just such a historical analysis would be of considerable service.

If we were to attempt such a post-mortem reconstruction, we might begin with the early inspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter, the Cold War shutting-down of the concept of 'security', the 'discovery' of the subaltern, and the new institutional challenges faced in crisis response and development work. We would surely include the breakthrough 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994), the creation of the Human Security section at the United Nations, the intellectual triumph, and practical ambivalence, of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (Weiss & Hubert, 2001).

My exercise is a different one. My aim in the following is to ask the question of 'the human', whose security it is human security's ambition to advance and preserve.

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New research and new reflexion – by anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers and others – suggests that the humanity of humans is, as with most phenomena, finite, that the definition or concept that regulates it has limits, that these limits have become more tangible, and that, as a consequence, a new look at 'human security' is warranted (Baxi, 2009; Braidotti, 2013; Dinello, 2005; Fukuyama, 2003; Hayles, 1999; Ong & Collier, 2005; Pin-Fat, 2013).

The discourse of human security

The discourse of human security emerges as a discourse of the individual. Like many natural law-based principles, it assumes the inviolable character of the individual, endowed with dignity and innate worth from which flow a certain set of rights. Human security also presents itself as a discourse about security. It is a narrative about what threats to the individual are and what moral claims individuals have to security. In this sense, it presupposes some very fundamental ideas about what the essence of danger and individuality actually are. It builds on an implicit understanding of what it means for the individual to be in danger. And since the project of human security ('freedom from fear, freedom from want') puts human experience – fear – in the centre, human security also presupposes an understanding of what it is for the individual to be in danger – affective, perceptive, emotional, spiritual, moral danger.

Human security announces itself – not least in the 1994 Human Development Report and elsewhere – as a challenge to the hegemony of neorealism in the analysis of international politics and in the formulation of development policy. Neorealism, as we know, is not interested in the relationship between the individual and threats, but rather in the relation between states and threats. In its earliest incarnation – in the UNDP report – the focus of security is shifted from nation-state actors, operating in a closed international system, to sub-state groups, operating in a wide range of settings in regional, sub-regional, local and even personal contexts.

Born out of a pragmatic exercise in 1994, the concept of human security evolved rapidly through the early 2000s in association with a variety of intersecting interests. It is linked to the principles of human rights, to the changing environment of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and to the mechanisms of international humanitarian law, all of which have been progressively strengthened (Allouche, Nicol, Mehta, & Srivastava, 2016; Bittner, 1992; Moser, 2013; Newman, 2016; Nyman & Burke, 2016; Parsons, McCormac, Butavicius, & Ferguson, 2010; Tadjbakhsh, 2014).

This general evolution takes place against the background of a changing understanding about the nature of security. This understanding has two interrelated forms of emergence.

The first form of emergence involves our knowledge about human security, about the invention of a concept capable of accounting for a fully-formed, but largely invisible or ignored reality. In this context, the 1994 formulation of a set of ideas about human security constitutes the naming of a previously existing – and yet invisible – reality.

The second form of emergence corresponds to the inception of a new form of security, either a new set of objective threats confronting a new set of potential objects of threat, or a new experience or perception of threat, insecurity and vulnerability.

Both of these forms of emergence disrupt the relationship between security and the self. As is often pointed out, from the very origins of political theory, the object of security has been the community or the state. Already in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, a security threat is regarded as a menace to a shared order, a shared set of values, or shared property. This value is considered to be intrinsic. It springs out of the fact that it is shared, out of its shared-ness. Security, in this context, refers to the project of preserving the value that is affirmed by the social, political or cultural bond or consensus.

Human security, as we know, displaces the source of the intrinsic value of the object of security from a social, political or cultural collective to the individual. The value-function of security, its role as an indicator or referent of value-under-threat, is moved from a collective, inter-subjective determination of value to an individual determination of value.

This implies not only that the consensus-forming mechanisms of groups – in this case, nation-states – is no longer accountable for security assessments and measures taken, but also that security values need not even be articulated at the level of political dialogue. Security values, i.e. values in need of securitisation, are not part of political dialogue or consensus and possibly remain un-articulated at the individual level.

In short, the discourse of human security stakes strong and important claims about both the human and about security.

Yet both the human and security itself are changing rapidly, both as concepts and as ontologies – or kinds of being. What is the future of human security in a reality where the human and security become something else? Something they were not before?

Of course, human security has come under critical pressure from a variety of critical positions since its inception and development (Chandler, 2008; cf. Chandler & Hynek, 2011; den Boer & de Wilde, 2008; Duffield & Waddell, 2006; Ryerson, 2010). These criticisms have contributed in many ways to strengthen the robustness of the concept and its application.

What we wish to ask here is how does the evolving notion of the human bode for the concept and practice of human security? What is the human in human security, and where is it going?

The human

The humanity of the human has thus long been taken for granted, and yet it has not remained unchanged. The specificity of human beings has invisibly, insipidly changed in relation to it.

In terms of the rights, privileges and responsibilities attributed to human beings, we are aware of a certain convergence in the 18th century under the aegis of the European Enlightenment. The core assumptions behind the principles that ultimately give force and legitimacy to the concept and practice of human security are the direct heritage of this condensation. We might be surprised to learn that, like the discourse of human security, the concept of the human also has a clear historical framing. It is of course far older than the historical framing of human security.

We do not often think of the human as being contingent, as being something that might or might not exist. We do not think of the human as not existing or as ever ceasing to exist. We simply take it as a matter of fact, as something that has always been the case and always will be.

But, from a biological point of view, it is taken as a matter of fact that human beings have not always walked the earth. And it is generally regarded as uncontroversial to assert that the human species will someday disappear altogether.

From the point of view of consciousness – from human beings understood as conscious beings, creating and appreciating meaning, equipped with reason, spirituality, aesthetic sense, etc. – the problem is trickier and perhaps more controversial. But still, few would accept or defend the claim that humans understood as conscious or sentient beings have a beginning and end.

Even the most conservative view would argue that the beginning of human consciousness is identical with the biological origin of humans, and that its end is identical with the biological end.

To many, this is a natural continuation of the evolution of scientific knowledge. Simply put, the rise of modern science has naturally brought with it the rise of a certain human science, the science of the human understood as an object, as a thing, the focus of study. The particularity of this epistemological novelty is that the sciences developed toward the end of the 19th century were minted for naturally occurring objects. Beginning with the 'scientific revolution' in astronomy, enormous changes took place in the fields of physics, chemistry, geology, biology and ecology, all on the natural side of reality.

The human sciences emerged essentially as an outgrowth – or perhaps a reaction to the natural sciences. With them emerged the 'discovery' of the human not only as the possessor of knowledge, but also as an object of knowledge.

The problem that emerges, as dramatically pointed out by Michel Foucault in the early 1970s, is that the rational, instrumental concepts and tools of the natural sciences adapt poorly to the irrational and non-instrumental qualities of human beings.

What is more, we have become aware of these limitations and the unease they cause us. The 'human being' is the invention of the modern scientific epistemology, and yet cannot stand up to it.

As Foucault puts it in the famous conclusion from *The Order of Things*:

> … man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. […] As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. (Foucault, 1973, pp. 421–422)

In short, the human, understood as a problem of knowledge, of science, is a very recent phenomenon, and a declining or disappearing phenomenon.

This is not meant as an alarmist proposition by Foucault. It is neither a prediction, normative claim, nor threat. On the contrary, it is a richly documented claim, based on a detailed analysis of the epistemological foundation of the notion of the human.

It is the first step in a wide-ranging set of theories about the nature of humanity in its meeting with a rapidly changing world of technology. It is the first sign of what might be considered the posthuman, the new forms and extensions of the human.

These forms and extensions touch on the premises that support the concept and practice of human security.

What is the posthuman?

It goes without saying that current reflexion and debate surrounding the application of the human security approach rests upon a strong assumption that 'the human' as an idea is stable, universally understood both by human security providers and human security beneficiaries, that it is an empirically observable reality unproblematically shared by all.

In other words – to return to the two fundamental freedoms – 'the human' that embodies the desire for 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' is universal in both perception and action, and the experiences of 'want', of 'fear' and of 'freedom' are also shared in a similar way by all.

However, a number of anthropologists, ethnologists, psychologists, philosophers, political analysts, and others have come to question how unproblematic this premise of human security actually is. They point to numerous types and kinds of evidence that suggest that this assumption is a weak one, and that the humanity of humans is gradually evolving, that something called the posthuman can and should be identified and discussed.

Conceptions of the posthuman generally fall into three categories, with a wide range of nuances in between.

First, there are understandings of the posthuman that relate to physical enhancements to the human body, and which have consequences that reach beyond the body and to humanity itself.

Second, there are a wide range of understandings of the posthuman that relate to changes in subjectivity, that is, that relate to the status of the humans as cognisant, self-aware actors in the world.

Third, there are a range of notions of the posthuman that begin with the increasing digitalisation of the self and our accelerated relationship to technologically-guided information flows and technologies.

Clearly, these three categories overlap quite significantly. In particular, it is on the basis of technological change that assertions about a posthuman subjectivity or morality are formed.

1. Technological enhancements

Firstly, the advent and increasing commonality of technological enhancements forms the basis for a certain entry into the posthuman. The bio-technological human has long been the object of science fiction and popular fascination, at the most elementary level. It concerns the supplementing of the human body with one or another technological appendage in order to treat an illness or injury, or, alternatively, to enhance the capabilities of the body in order to improve physical performance. This includes everything from mounting a simple prosthesis, to more complex in-body technologies, like pace-makers, artificial hearing devices, and the like.

Many would argue that such interventions in no way touch upon our humanity. Others would argue that bio-technological forms of palliative care, i.e. those that impact upon experiences of illness and wellness, necessarily intervene in our very humanity.

More complex interventions penetrate more deeply the division between human and machine. The advent of cybernetics – and perhaps even the imagination of it since the turn of the 20th century – has more radically collapsed traditional understandings of the human. Here, computer components are used to intervene in mental processes, thought-controlled technologies function side by side with technologically assisted 'thought' (Hayles, 1999).

How much of our physical bodies must be supplanted or lost before we should be considered 'less' than human? And how much can our physical bodies be enhanced before we become something 'more' than human? The examples are many: enhanced cognition, enhanced memory, better vision, hearing, touch, etc.

How much will improved biophysical resilience through implants, gene therapy or gene modification make us free from the struggles for human security, for providing it and for experiencing it? How will it change our experience of those in need, or of our own need? What are the effects of bio-technical engineering on our humanity and on our humanitarianism?

2. Evolution of subjectivity

Secondly, we observe the posthuman in terms of the evolution of subjectivity. In the Enlightenment-based paradigm of subjectivity evoked a moment ago, the subject is equated with self-consciousness, autonomy, free will, judgement, self-regulation and, above all, rationality. The cognisant subject's experience of the world is one of homogeneity, where the self-same subject regards other subjects as either possessing the same properties or, in the logic of colonialism or what we might call civilisationalism, what is regarded as different is simultaneously regarded as inferior. The accelerating experience of the other, of other races, peoples, cultures, genders, complicates our sense of self, in the best cases enriching it, in the worse cases destabilising it (Braidotti, 2013, p. 15).

These are the contextual qualities and historical facts

that, for better or worse, have stemmed from and in return supported the European, i.e. 'human', since 'the human' is first and foremost a European discovery. The human is the European baseline, the reality of the human subject at the height of its evolution of itself.

Yet advances in the human and social sciences and their study of consciousness have revealed a reality that is far more culturally, socially, and morally complex than the 17th-century innovators of the subject could have foreseen. In short, the 'human', seen from the point of view of subjectivity, has been destabilised and changed.

3. The digital self

Lastly, the explosion of information technologies, data gathering, transmission and storage practices continues to change our experience of the world and of ourselves, and many of the basic moral categories that have long determined and fixed the humanity of humans.

Just as Cartesian subjectivity is the pillar of the humanity in human security, protection of what today is called the 'data subject' with respect to personal data is a basic building-block of the European legal-ethical framework. And again, technological 'progress', the evolution of things foreign to us that become part of us, has always put these principles under pressure.

The rapid evolution of digital technologies increases this pressure. The knowledge core of self-knowledge is weakened, even damaged by the multiple presence of information, about us, on us.

We are not only split in relation to the knowledge that is held about us by others – massive, uncontrollable, fed into systems we cannot be aware of to engage in actions and activities for which we cannot account but for which we are held accountable.

Personal data has become the competitor for the self. On the one hand, there is the increasing identification of the person with its personal data, the so-called 'data zombies'. The digitalized properties of any person

increasingly take precedence over the non-digitalized properties, by virtue of their utility, generality, and ease of transmission. As a consequence, those aspects of the human – and human dignity – that are irreducible to digital form are devalued.

There is an increasing identification of data, primarily 'Big Data', with our social reality and the forces that govern our lives. By the same type of process of valorization of digital properties of social life relative to non-digital, the forms of social existence that are less immediately realizable through their non-digital forms become de-valorized.

These interwoven processes have a great impact on the notion of the moral self. While ethical and legal definitions vary, all seem to converge around the notion of self-worth, self-respect, and integrity, the basic humanist idea that human beings have implicit value. Human dignity is a self-consciousness, awareness of oneself as worthy. The 'self' is in this sense a core notion linked to the dignity of a natural person, and, as a consequence, of a data subject.

In practical terms, this implies that the task of creating an ethical framework for implementing human dignity as a fundamental right must not take 'human dignity' for granted. Protecting human dignity through data protection must mean asking the question of human dignity, and putting in place methods and procedures that will encourage and nourish such questioning.

Conclusion

Summarising these observations: the human is changing. What is understood and experienced as human is not what it once was. Human security, a deeply principled idea, should not be considered unchanged.

The question is not whether but how much human security is changed and whether the foundation and mission of human security is impacted by these changes.

Obviously, a number of objections might be made to these arguments.

One objection might be raised that those who are affected by the technological revolutions described in this article are not those that are commonly impacted by the need to invoke the concept of human security.

However, the norms of the technological human are imported to the field through the bureaucracies of development aid and security. It is only a matter of time before development and human security work will be saturated with the efficiency-giving technologies that have brought humanity to the edge of its meaningfulness.

Another objection to this reflexion springs from the heart of the human security approach. It says that, while human beings around the world display significant differences, it is the commonality which makes human security a significant approach. The common ground for the deployment of one uniform concept of human security in a range of settings toward a large range of human beings is the shared aspiration for 'freedom from want, freedom from fear'.

This is a strong argument, one which recalls the arguments against the human security approach based on questions about its post-colonial blind spots, its problems with portability and disregard for its own power structure.

And yet, the question we ask here is a different one. We are asking whether discontinuities in the human itself, in the concept of the human, but also in the perception and experience of humanity, are such that the core anchoring of human security will also be put under pressure.

Indeed, what are the human insecurities of the posthuman? What is the human security that can be delivered by the coming posthuman actors and agents of human security?

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