

(THE) MAPPING OF POSTHUMANISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY¹

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Abstract

*Posthumanism designates a series of reactions to the idea of the study of man in terms of humanism. The studies of posthumanism, like any other studies with the same prefix 'post' namely postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, etc. include in itself the studies of humanism, modernism, structuralism, colonialism, and the like. The term 'post' has also been often used in two senses, one in terms of time frame, that is historically, and the other, as a style of thought. Posthumanism also includes within itself the studies of man's relation to machines or technology on the one hand, and animals or non-human on the other hand. Lyotard for example used the term 'inhuman' in his essay *Postmodern Fable* to discuss the nature of posthumanism. Posthumanism has also been approached from many different aspects from literature to art to science-fiction. The paper, however, confines its discussion on the philosophical discussion of the same.*

Accordingly, the paper is divided into three sections. First, give a brief overview of the philosophy of (hu)man, the question of Being, and humanism. Second, is an attempt to present the postmodernist (or rather the poststructuralism) account of understanding man or rather the end of man. The crux of the paper is the mapping of the philosophy of posthumanism through the lens of deconstructing humanism. This will be explicitly discussed in the third section of the paper.

Keywords: *posthumanism, man, human, inhuman, Dasein, Derrida, deconstruction*

I

Philosophy of (hu)man, Question of Being and Humanism

The Greek philosopher Aristotle asserted that man is a rational animal. This definition of man by virtue of the quality of rationality (is said to) provide us with an account, nothing less than a featherless biped or fragmented man. If one goes back to Plato, one can recall Plato's definition of man as a political animal; furthermore, we find Socrates' understanding of man as too much of a mystery. God remained at the

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center, and the divine message exhorted to the Athenians was to take care of their souls and not to ruin their lives by letting care of the body and of the various possessions that precede the good of the soul. Hence, the focus was always more on the moral qualities of man, and the cultivation of moral qualities of man, like justice, goodness, courage, and temperance.

Descartes gave fresh air to the truth of (hu)man and what it means to be (hu)man when he provided us with an account of 'the rational mind,' or 'soul' which is entirely distinct from the body. In his *Second Meditation*, Descartes raised the question 'But, what is man?' in order to consider the nature of the human mind and arrive at the notion that *I am a thing which thinks*. And thereafter follows the famous dictum of 'I think, therefore I exist' or *Cogito, Ergo Sum*. The issues and problems surrounding the *Cogito* has fascinated philosophers for many centuries. Husserl took up Descartes' *Cogito* to give the form of transcendental; Heidegger directly assaulted it as an isolated subject that even failed to address the metaphysical question of the subject itself; Sartre's existential philosophy was however founded on a different version of the *Cogito* whose certainty was never clear and distinct; Lacan on the other hand gave an obsessional psychoanalytical reading of the modern subject in terms of Descartes' *Cogito*. And there is also the (in)famous debate between Foucault and Derrida on the idea of *Cogito and Madness*, at the end of the twentieth century, that drifts apart the two thinkers. The *Cogito* has also been a topic of interest among other thinkers, like Ryle, Wittgenstein, Russell, Bernard Williams, and many more. It has become the most complicated debate in the history of Western philosophy, which otherwise is also taken to be one of the most simple, clear, and distinct. The point of putting forward Descartes' *Cogito* is because the preamble to the *Cogito* in terms of 'a thinking thing' opens the question of the modern subject, or the Cartesian subject, which is most often read as the founding principle of humanism. In other words, the genealogical studies of humanism can be traced back to the idea of Descartes' *Cogito*.

Descartes has also given us some account of the inhuman, when in his *Discourse* he told us a story about a monkey, that was actually a machine. He argues that if there were a machine that looked like a monkey, both figures are, for Descartes, ultimately inhuman as both lack the exercise of rational thought; by the same token, there is no essential difference between them. For Descartes (hu)man therefore is absolutely distinct from the inhuman (be it animal or machine). Following which Badmington rephrases Descartes 'I think, therefore I am' to include *I think, therefore I*

*cannot possibly be an automaton.*² (18) This is the anthropocentrism of Descartes humanism.³

The matrix of Cartesian dualism and its humanism that privileges the mind over the body (to such an extent that the essence of the human depends in no way upon its embodiment) is carried on by contemporary science fiction theories and movies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The essential distinction between the human and inhuman has moved from the physical to the metaphysical (in which humans have feelings, whereas aliens do not, or even have some feelings). This has given us a metaphysics of humanism that operates on the binary opposition of human and inhuman. That is, it is also a metaphysics of absolute difference between the two that operates around *the principle of hierarchy*. The primacy of hierarchy here refers to the study of humanism that takes a central role in the history of Western philosophy. This was subsequently followed up in the work of many other modern and contemporary philosophers. For example, Kant's idea of Man as an end in itself; Hegel's notion of Self and Other, etc. There is also Marx's idea of man in terms of labor and production; Freud's psychoanalytical understanding of man; Darwin's evolutionary idea of man etc.

Heidegger's Humanism and the Question of Being: the New Humanism

Humanism and its crisis, however, were inevitably marked by the catastrophes created by the horror of the holocaust and the two-world war. Many thinkers and philosophers of the late twentieth century made different attempts to revitalize humanism in different forms. In continental philosophy, mention may be made of three main essays specifically addressed to humanism. They are Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, (1946/1947) Sartre's, *Is Existentialism a Humanism* (or *Existentialism and Humanism*), (1945/1946) Levinas's *Humanism of the Other*, (1972) and Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror*. (1947/1969) Not to forget is Nietzsche's attack on humanism. The focus of the essay, however, is specifically restricted to Heidegger's account of humanism.

² Badmington, N. "Theorizing Posthumanism" in *Cultural Critique*. No. 53, Posthumanism Winter, 2003, pp.10-27

³ The anthropocentrism of Descartes humanism collapsed if it became impossible to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the inhuman; that is if a machine for example is given enough organ that would be capable of responding in a manner that is utterly indistinguishable from the human. In such case, reason would no longer be capable to distinguish humans from any nonhuman or inhuman as such.

Heidegger's essay *Letter on Humanism*, written in the fall of 1946 (published in 1947) is not merely a philosophical meditation on the 'hubris of subjectivity' in the blinding light of Being. It was a careful reformulation and restructuring of a narrative concerning the events with which Heidegger is most profoundly concerned. The *Letter* was initially a response to questions put to Heidegger by a young French philosopher Jean Beaufret concerning the meaning of humanism (in the wake of the Second World War). The *Letter* includes aspects of the 'humanism problem' in National Socialist ideology. It was also a direct response of Heidegger to Sartre's lectures *Existentialism is a Humanism*, which was just published. Heidegger's *Letter* provides an extended statement concerning his philosophical position that explains why he is not a 'humanist,' particularly in Sartre's sense of the term.⁴

Heidegger begins the *Letter* with his famous distinction between the 'essence of man' and the 'essence of truth'. He argues that it is only 'thought' that is concerned with Being that can reveal the 'essence of truth'. That is, neither man's existence nor his will, but Being itself is the source of action. Heidegger argues that whereas the Western 'logic' and 'grammar' and 'metaphysic' have seized control of the interpretation of language' and posited subject and object as appropriate terms to define the human condition; Heidegger's *Letter* is an attempt to liberate language from the grammar of Western metaphysic and return to the essence of truth, which is the truth of Being.

Heidegger argues that the grammar of Western metaphysics is entirely responsible for what he calls, the 'homelessness' of modern man. It is also the root cause of the 'forgetting of Being'. This 'homelessness' for Heidegger is manifested in many forms, like in communication, technology, cultural industry, and also in illusory notions such as public and private. It is here that Heidegger defines humanism as any conception which places 'man' at the center and 'privileges man's essence' (as implicated in this forgetting). According to Heidegger, all humanism has as its ground, the projection of some essential characteristic onto man. Heidegger writes that,

"However different these forms of humanism may be in purpose and in principle, in the mode and means of their respective realizations, and in the form of their teaching, they nonetheless all agree that the *humanitas* of *homo humnus* is determined with regard to an already established

⁴ Infact a substantial theme of the *Letter* is read as the dissociation of his philosophical position from that of Sartre's existential humanism (in Sartre's sense of the existential and humanism). Heidegger moreover felt it necessary because of the fact that Sartre had explicitly associated him with his own position in his lecture on *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world.”
(LH:202)

Heidegger also refers to the apparent difference thoughts - the examples of Greeks, Romans, Christians, Marxism, and modern Sartre, as ultimately without distinction. He noted that the history of metaphysics is the history of a decline, the devolution of this anthropocentric and foundational hubris in which ‘man’s essence or existence’ is always prior to Being. Heidegger concluded that humanism (including even the most radical completion in Nietzsche) was a fatal error in the philosophical historical constitution of the West.

He redefines ‘humanism as the inclusive process’ that is bound up with ‘the beginning, the unfolding, and the end of metaphysics,’ and which, in accord with any one of several differing perspectives, but each time knowingly, the ‘human being is placed in the center of Being without therefore becoming the highest beings.’ He also carefully includes the typical Nazi’s definition of ‘man’ among universalist, individualist, national, and ethnic ‘humanism’ in terms of the ‘human being that is first a humanity or mankind,’ then an individual or a community, and a people or group of peoples.⁵

The *Letter* concludes with an appeal to Being’s guardian and shepherds to an ‘open resistance to humanism.’ (LH: 225) The *Letter* was also a gesture of defiance in the cloak of humility. It complains of the peculiar dictatorship of the public sphere, the conflict of ‘isms,’ and also his tilt towards Marxism. And the victory of the American and Soviet armies constituted a descent into the metaphysics of the machine. Or in Marxist terms, the ‘power of the technical’, whose first victim is Germany. In other words, the German catastrophe is globalized, insofar as ‘homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.’ (LH:219) The *Letter* in short was a missive from ‘Being to man,’ absolving its author of all responsibility. Heidegger’s *Dasein* has become Being’s act that is also directed as ‘a revelation of Being to man.’⁶

⁵ Rabinback. A. “Heidegger’s Letter in Humanism as Text and Event” in *New German Critique*, No. 62, 1994, pp 3-38 .

⁶ Heidegger in the work, *The Question of Technology* (1954) gives an account of the readiness-to-hand that he already discusses in *Being and Time*. He analyses technology not in terms of any tools that make our life easier; or that which can be taken to be an instrument for manipulation of human ends. He argues that the essence of technology relates not to the production practice, but to the particular way of revealing the world. He reveals that humans do not control technology; human is rather determined by the revealing technology. His arguments aimed at calling into question ‘the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology.’ The point of the argument is that human beings are defined by activities that are dependent on the realization of a number of projects that are dependent on humans non-thematically ‘using’ tools to achieve. That is, while human uses tools to

Heidegger ends the *Letter* with a brief statement of the thesis that ‘the beginning of metaphysics in the thought of Plato is at the same time the beginning of ‘humanism.’ The *Letter* calls for our capacity to realize the possibility of truth, ‘*ek-sistence*’. He takes it that it is only ‘*ek-sistence*’ which is truly essential to humanity. In other words, the answer to the question ‘what the human being is’ (as it is called in the traditional language of metaphysics, or the essence of the human being) lies in his *ek-sistence*. Heidegger furthermore elaborated on the key to humanity’s *ek-sistence* as language, that is ‘the house of Being’. It is also ‘the home of human being.’⁷

When it comes to existential philosopher Sartre, his existentialism as a humanism is distinguished from the essentialist humanism of the Enlightenment. At the core of Sartre’s work was the interpretation of Nietzsche’s notion of ‘God is dead’ and ‘man killed him’. And since, for Sartre, there is nothing before being, ‘existence precedes essence’. So, whereas the philosophy of enlightenment projects a universal idea onto human beings and asserts that every one possesses the same basic qualities; existentialism, particularly of Sartre argues that ‘man first exists’ and ‘he materialized in the world; encounters himself’ and ‘only afterward defines himself. Human life for Sartre is abandoned and can no longer be build on any religious guidance. This also implies that man must bear the full consequences. Humanism thereby is formulated on the basis that everything is permissible, there are no fixed values inscribed anywhere. And since ‘man is condemned to be free; man is not only that which he conceives himself to be but also that which ‘he makes of himself.’ Man’s existence therefore consists of ‘nothing else’ than the ‘sets of man’s actions, nothing else than his life.’ What we see in Sartre is an attempt to transform ‘existentialism’ into a form of ‘humanism’ and his existential humanism pursues an integration of phenomenology and Marxism through the concept of ‘subjectivity’ that is predicated on ‘individual agency’ of free beings. In other words, Sartre’s humanism rests on a phenomenology which conceives of authenticity as the transcendental being of subjectivity. And, the subject is authentic to the extent to which it is free, and it is free to the extent to which it acts responsibly. Concerning Sartre’s understanding of Marxism, it may be noted that Sartre does not consider ‘labor’ as a historical subject. The historical subject, for Sartre’s existentialist humanism is tantamount to the individual signifier, who qualifies for agency, in the more existentialist sense of the term.

achieve projects, this ‘use’ is non-thematic; and meaning is simply taken up by humans without any of the reflective calculation inherent to instrumental utility.

⁷ And it is not the case that ‘human being is at home in their language’ such that language becomes a mere container for their preoccupation; rather language is at once *the house of Being* and *the home of human being*.

So, whereas for Sartre, man's freedom to act is rooted in subjectivity, which alone can grant man his dignity; wherein the Cartesian cogito becomes not only a possible point for existentialism; it is also the only possible basis for humanism. Heidegger on the contrary insisted that *Dasein* or existence is and remains beyond the pale of mere Cartesian subjectivism. To this extent, Heidegger rejected the humanistic tradition because it remains stamped in the mold of metaphysics, engrossed in beings and oblivious to Being.

The next section is an exposition of the antihumanistic or critique of humanism in terms of the politics of (human) subject, as developed by the poststructuralist account of thinkers like Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault.

II

Antihumanism and the Politics of (the) Subject

The legacy of the 1960s antihumanism emerged with the fall of humanism that also marked the collapse of the existential humanism of Sartre and the social humanism of Merleau-Ponty; or Marxist humanism. The corresponding antihumanist project of Lacan, Althusser and Foucault provided the philosophical landscape for posthumanism in contemporary philosophy.

Althusser's Theoretical Anti-Humanism:

So, whereas, Heidegger opposes the Sartrean humanism because it not only testifies to the 'forgetfulness of Being,' but also does not set 'the *humanitas* of man high enough; 'Althusser, often referred to as the French Marxist philosopher also performs a similar move in criticizing humanism, (although in many respect different from Heidegger). Althusser's reading of Marx in his essay '*Marxism and Humanism*'⁸ gives an account of what he calls the mature writing of Marx that articulated his 'theoretical anti-humanism'. It challenges the existential humanism of Sartre for essentializing man in general. It also criticizes the centralization of 'labor' as the historical subject which can fulfill humanity based on its transcendental attributes of being. Althusser argues that what was radically new in Marx's contribution was not only the awareness of the novelty of the concept of historical materialism but also 'the depth of the theoretical revolution (that) they imply and inaugurate.' The latter was a radical critique of the *theoretical* pretensions of every philosophical humanism. Following Marx, Althusser rejected all recourse to human essence and the justification of specific conceptions of man as ultimately ideological.

⁸ Althusser. L. (1965) For Marx, trans. Brewster. B. Verso. London. New York. 1969/2005 P. 219-248.

He argues that such a notion of man forms an illusion which can be demystified on the grounds of a materialist critique of societal struggles.

According to Althusser, the humanism of Sartre (as well as the social-humanism of Merleau-Ponty) shows 'an imposter ideological makeshift' that is in fact 'an ideal wish' and also 'dangerous.' In an attempt to rescue Marxism from Sartre (and Merleau-Ponty) Althusser's reading of Marx seeks to separate the early 'anthropological Marx' from the late 'theoretical Marx.' Althusser noted that after 1845, Marx distanced himself from the notion that there is a universal human essence. Althusser reads the early Marx as ideological and strongly invested in anthropological; whereas he views the later Marx as more sophisticated and advanced, that [he] is even capable of countering Hegel by providing on his own ground, a dialectic materialism. So, whereas Sartre essentializes individual agency as human essence, Althusser presented a Marxist's theoretical anti-humanism that essentializes the *matter* of History, its *real* object and conceives science as the only possibility of effective social critique. The theoretical anti-humanism of Althusser seeks to demystify the particular ideology in play as 'the site of class struggle' and develop a different ideology of history that is essentially a never-ending process of class struggle. It is an ongoing struggle between the material base and the ideologically disguised superstructure. Althusser's theoretical Marxist anti-humanism is the recognition and knowledge of humanism itself that is as an *ideology* that never falls into the idealist illusion of believing that knowledge of an object is ultimately replaceable by the object or dissipates its existence. Hence, for Althusser, Marx never believed that knowledge of the nature of *money* (as a social relation) could ever destroy its appearance, or its form of existence as a thing. This is because, this appearance was its very being, that is as much necessary as the existing mode of production. Althusser historicizes specific ideologies as false-consciousness and proposes 'a theory of ideology in general' that is transhistorical and unexceptional. In other words, Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism has given a structural analysis of the social relations of capitalist production against the background of the 'death of individual agency.'

Thus, when Althusser reads Marx's *The German Ideology* (1845) as determined to overturn the traditional ways of thinking about the human subject, the principal target of work was the humanist belief in a natural human essence which exists outside history, politics, and social relation. So, whereas, the philosophical climate within (and against) which Marx writes followed the idealist account of Hegel (who believed that an authentic consciousness was the point from which everything else processed); Marx overturned Hegel's idea of consciousness and insisted that consciousness does not determine a person's social life. Rather, Marx would argue that

it is social life that determines consciousness. Hereupon, idealism was replaced by materialism. Subjectivity, in the Marxist account, is not the cause but the effect of an individual's material conditions of existence. The subject thus is not given; and eternal man is no more; he is replaced by a history and a contingency, denied by humanism. It is in this sense that Marx makes possible a theoretical anti-humanism. It provided the radically different awareness that different material conditions produce incompatible subjectivities. The crux of Althusser's argument is that the Marxist policy of humanism is a precondition for a theoretical anti-humanism. As he writes at the end of his essay on '*Marxism and Humanism*,' that :

“When (eventually) a Marxist policy of humanist ideology, that is, a political attitude to humanism, is achieved- a policy which may be either a rejection or an critique, or a use, or a support, or a development, or a humanist renewal of contemporary forms of ideology in the *ethico-political* domain- this policy will only have been possible on the absolute condition that it is based on Marxist philosophy, and a precondition for this is theoretical anti-humanism.” (231)

Foucault and the Order of (Hu)man(ism):

The legacy of (anti)humanism has touched every aspect of Western thought, and the idea of the image of the figure of 'man' being erased from the sand by the incoming tide of change that finds itself beached, for every new order of things harbors traces of the old. This is what Foucault, in the final paragraph of his book *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*,⁹ writes,

“..without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises-were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.” (2005:422)

Foucault also says that “Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.” (422)

He also adds that,

“Man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that

⁹ Foucault.M. (1966). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge. London and New York. 2005.

situation at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language.” (421)

To quote him again,

“One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge... man is a recent invention within it.....in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the Same- only one that which began a century and a half and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear.” (421-122)

Foucault’s *The Order of Things* gives an account of the humanist figure of Man that constituted a certain historical moment. His work proceeds to suggest that Man must be understood as a recent invention (and not pace humanism) that is not an eternal, naturally occurring phenomenon. His study of the archaeology of human science marks a certain reorganization of knowledge in which Man could therefore disappear if a further epistemic shift were to take place. He writes,

“ Strangely enough, man – the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates- is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge.” (xxv)

He also added that,

“It is confronting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.” (xxv)

The central theme of Foucault’s archaeology of anti-humanism is the anti-fundamentalist account of human nature. He elaborated on the varying forms of human subjectivity that are centered on different epistemic paradigms, constituted by different cultural practices. For instance, Foucault’s works on the history of sexuality illustrate the constitution of ‘moral’ subjectivity in the context of sexual behaviour.¹⁰

¹⁰ Also, contrary to both Sartre and Althusser, Foucault’s genealogy focuses on the ‘power-relation’ that constitutes the formation of historically hardened material realities that position and subjective human activity. Unlike Althusser, Foucault, however, does not believe in the materialist ground of class contradictions as manifested in historically specific times.

Lacan's Psychoanalysis of the (hu)man Subject:

Lacan's psychosis also provided us with an alternative contemporary in the study of antihumanism. His antihumanism is a powerful and attractive critique of the excesses of earlier humanism that relied heavily on transparent self-knowledge and freedom. Lacan precisely contests the idea of a natural or spiritual identity of 'man' on which ethical discourse could be founded in the name of human. By placing unconsciousness as the forefront of human experience, Lacan dissolves 'the subject,' as the 'knower.' The insight of Lacan's subject *per se* follows 'the logic of the signifier' as well as 'the structural law of lack.' The human subject for Lacan is 'the subject of the unconsciousness'. It is also (once) referred to as 'a-human'.¹¹

Lacan's psychoanalysis was no friend to humanism. In his work, *The Psychoses*¹² Lacan writes that,

“To be a psychoanalyst is imply to open your eyes to the evident fact that nothing malfunctions more than human reality. If you believe that you have a well-adapted, reasonable ego, which knows its way around, how to recognize what is to be done and not to be done, and how to take reality into account, then there is nothing left to do but send you packing.”¹³ (82)

He continues that,

“ psychoanalysis.....shows you that nothing is more stupid than human destiny, that is, that one is always being fooled.” (82)

Lacan's psychoanalysis took the challenges to humanism in proposing that human activity is governed in part by unconscious motives. Whereas, Freud for example problematized the Cartesian model of being as rational and fully-conscious though; Lacan as one of the most compelling interpreters of Freud, reformulated the words of Descartes from ' I think therefore I am' to ' I think when I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.'

In other words, Lacan's psychoanalysis of the notion of subject is the displacement of the traditional human subject. Unlike Western traditional subjects. Lacanian subject resists any algorithmic governing regimes of human subjects as central. It focuses on what he would rather call *the split subject* or *the divided self*. The self or subject for Lacan is always in *separation* and alienated from the self, subject, or

¹¹ Lacan at the endnote of his collected work *Ecrits: A Selection* uses the term 'a-human' as something that did not cause him the least distress. (324)

¹² The work is published as *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*.

¹³ Lacan. J. *Book III The Psychoses* (1955-56) trans. Grigg R. W.W Norton & Company New York. London.

ego. He reads the human subject as the subject of the unconsciousness that lies beyond the ego. It is in this context that the relevance of Lacan's work in understanding (anti) humanism cannot be delimited. It continues to demonstrate an understanding of human subjects that shifts our thinking to unconsciousness that elucidates the condition within which posthumanist thoughts arise. It reveals symptoms of its flaws, the blindness to anthropomorphization, and projection that not only provides the ground for the study of posthumanism but produces a whole posthumanism, than any philosophical displacement of human centrality could.

III

Posthumanism as Deconstruction of Humanism

It would not be an exaggeration to say that posthumanism inherits something of its 'post' from poststructuralism, a philosophical movement that emerged in the 1960s with the work of Derrida. Whereas antihumanism (at the same point of time) was declaring a departure from the legacy of humanism, Derrida patiently make a break from this point. His deconstruction deliberately observed that 'the end of Man' is bound to be written in 'the language of Man.' His essay 'The Ends of Man' turns away from the philosophy of the post-war generation (for example Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir) towards the radical thinking of a new generation. He gives a close reading of Hegel and Husserl, and Heidegger in particular, who were placed under the heading of humanism by the post-war thinkers.

Derrida took to heart Heidegger's critique of humanism and re-articulated the post-war 'question of man'. His essay on 'The End of Man' expounded the main theme of Heidegger's *Letter*, to the effect that Derrida projected the humanism propounded by Sartre as 'metaphysical' in a pejorative sense. Derrida furthermore argues that Sartre's idea of humanism and his interpretation of the same has infected the work of German philosopher Heidegger (and also Hegel and Husserl's notion of humanism) whose work, has set the intellectual context for mid-twentieth century French philosophy. It even gives rise to the translation and association of these thinkers with the 'metaphysical humanism' which they criticize or de-limit. (119) Derrida thereafter puts forward the effort of these three thinkers (Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger) to move beyond humanism.

Derrida moved on to provide a deconstruction of Heidegger's (new) humanism. Derrida, in his footnote to 'The End of Man' quoted Heidegger's notion of reducing humanism to metaphysics. He writes from Heidegger's *Letter*:

“Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of man that

already presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical. The result is that what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of man is determined, is that it is ‘humanistic.’ Accordingly, every humanism remains metaphysical.”(118)

Derrida’s argument permits a rethinking of the notion of humanism as well as the position of antihumanism. Derrida’s critique of humanism takes the form of deconstruction.¹⁴ As for deconstruction, Derrida in an interview with John D. Caputo states that his deconstructive reading of Plato or Aristotle ‘is an analysis which tries to find out how their thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus.’ (Caputo, 1997:9) Derrida also added that ‘deconstruction.....insisted not on multiplicity for itself but on the heterogeneity, the difference, the disassociation, which is absolutely necessary for the relation to the other.’ (1997:13)

Derrida’s reading of Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*, recalls the latter ‘destruction’ of metaphysics or classical ontology (of anthropology and humanism of Sartre and Sartre’s reading of Heidegger as philosophically anthropocentric) is indeed, directed against humanism (or even existential humanism of Sartrian type). In other words, according to Derrida, Sartre had misread Heidegger (and also Hegel and Husserl) because Sartre (and the others in French) were using a humanist perspective . The essay provides a substantial analysis of Heidegger, in particular of his critical perspective of humanism, which was also nevertheless deconstructed by Derrida. So, how did Derrida deconstruct Heidegger’s account of humanism? Derrida’s deconstruction of Heidegger’s humanism includes in itself Derrida’s philosophy of posthumanism.

It may be recalled that in *Of Grammatology*¹⁵ Derrida sees ‘man’ primarily as a limit that excludes particular characteristics, ostracizing them from man’s essence. That is, ‘man’ is far from an innocuous or self-evident concept. He writes, ‘

“Man calls himself man only by drawing limits and excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness’ divinity.”(1976: 244)

¹⁴ Derrida’s deconstruction of humanism is also found in his two other works namely *Politics of Friendship* (1997) and *The Animal there therefore I am* (2008)

¹⁵ Derrida. *J. Of Grammatology*, trans. Spivak. G.C. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* noted Derrida 'pursues the question of Being' in such a way that, "the *Da* of *Dasein*" and "the *Da* of *Sein*" will signify 'as much the near as the far.' Heidegger, therefore, is guided by the two motifs of Being, what Derrida calls 'the *motif of Being* as presence' and 'the motif of the proximity of Being' to the 'essence of man.' (128)

From this, it follows that although Heidegger rejects the traditional notions of man, and unlike Sartre, does not 'presuppose' a particular 'concept of man.' However, noted Derrida, that Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* on his *Letter* in terms of the 'thinking of Being' (as the thinking of the truth of Being) that Heidegger uses to delimits humanism and metaphysics (that also furthermore provides the unity of metaphysics and humanism) remains a 'thinking of man.' (127) So, Derrida writes,

"Man and the name of man are not displaced (even) in *the question of Being* such as it is put to metaphysics. Even less do they disappear." (128)

Hence, according to Derrida, Heidegger's overthrowing of the traditional notion of (Sartre) existential humanism, could not avoid (or deconstruct) the 'presence' or the 'proximity' of man. And, it is this 'play of proximity' Derrida claims that makes *Dasein* remain ontically closest to being; yet ontologically furthest. In other words, the 'essence of man' is beings' own proximity to *Dasein*. The truth of being, as 'the proper end of man' is thereby determined only by its proximity, that is, but a form of presence.

The deconstructing reading of Heidegger's *Dasein* in terms of the analysis of proximity and presence is for Derrida 'a thinking of Being' which has "all the characteristic of a *relève* of humanism.' (134) In other words, Derrida claims that whereas Heidegger has radically deconstructed the domination of the metaphysics of *present*; Heidegger's 'thinking of this presence' can only metaphorize, by means of 'a profound necessity from which one cannot simply decide to escape, the language that it deconstructs.'" (131)

Hence, the deconstruction of Heidegger's Being involves a 'series of infinite now' that involves a heavy chain of metaphors, etymology, and double -meaning that Heidegger cannot escape. So, although Heidegger deconstructed metaphysical-humanism, for Derrida, Heidegger inscribed his *Dasein* within the Western tradition of Being and metaphysics. It is therefore what Derrida calls 'a change transgression into 'false exists'.' (135)

What we see in Derrida is a call for critics to repeat, what is implicit in the founding concepts, and the original problem is by no means a demand for a simple, straightforward repletion of the same concept; but a repetition is a certain way; in order to expose the overwhelming uncertainty of the certain discourse. In other words,

Derrida's deconstruction of humanism is not a repetition of humanism, but a certain way to deconstruct the anthropocentric thought of the same. The deconstruction of this metaphysical- anthropocentric humanism is to reveal the internal conflict, and the internal instabilities' fatal contradictions. In doing so, it exposes the rewriting and working through the legacy of humanism itself as posthumanism.¹⁶

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¹⁶ In the words of Badmington posthumanism thereby is not an absolute break of humanism. It is what remains of humanism. It is far more exciting, and far sexier than humans. It is the ghost of humanism. it is therefore not a complete change of terrain, a pure outside; but complemented by works that speak to humanism's ghost. (*Theorizing Posthumanism*: 15)

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