

**The Nihilist as a Not-Man.
An Analysis of Psychological Inhumanity***

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Abstract. A new philosophical and anthropological-psychological concept is needed for the alienated and radically different human being according to the nihilist Romanian-French philosopher E.M. Cioran. This concept of the *not-man* describes a post-anthropological subject, which is “inhuman” from a psychological point of view, emphasizing estrangement and otherness in the definition of humanity. I have compared Cioran’s provocative and unusual term with Nietzsche’s analysis of the overman – the difference between the two concepts proceeding from two conflicting nihilist perspectives – and I also have identified the not-man in the novel of the Japanese writer Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human*.

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“I was man and I no longer am now...”
(E.M. Cioran, *The Twilight of Thoughts*)

1. Cioran’s Not-Man

In his first Romanian book, *On the Heights of Despair* (1934), Emil Cioran constructs, in his ambiguous and lyrical style, a definition of a new concept, the *not-man*: “There are among men some who are not far above plants or animals, and therefore aspire to humanity. But those who know what it means to be Man long to be anything but ... If the difference between Man and animal lies in the fact that the animal can only be an animal whereas man can also be *not-man* – that is, something other than himself – then I am *not-man*.”¹

Cioran seems to be saying that there are undeveloped human beings, who are not at the level of mankind. The pride of being human is a symptom of the lesser men, who worship their deficit. Exaggerating, Cioran notes that these creatures are

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¹ E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 68–69.

almost at the level of plants and animals. Those who know that Man is a dead end, a being unable to evolve, despise the phenomenon of man. An important question must be asked: if we renounced humanity, whereto would we head? Should we become theocentric instead of anthropocentric? Or if the way towards divinity is closed, should we go back to animality? We understand that the not-man is no longer human. But how could one define it? From a psychological point of view, the *not-man* is a stranger (*alius*), a spiritual mutation. For instance, the overman transcended the human nature and occupied a new territory (as we shall see later, Cioran claimed that the overman conquered the domain of deity). However, the not-man went beyond humanity but found no such domain: that is why from the perspective of mankind, the not-man is a *subman*, a being unable to find a proper home and essence, a punishable psychological outsider.

In another Romanian book, *The Twilight of Thoughts* (1940), Cioran further develops this definition of non-humanity: “Cynics are no longer supermen or submen, they are post-men. One begins to understand and even love them, when a confession addressed to one or maybe to no one escapes from the pains of our absence: *I was man and I no longer am now...*”¹ One can ask: what do we become when we cease to be human? From a theological perspective we become demons, from a mythological perspective, we become Titans, from a psychological perspective we become psychopaths, from a philosophical perspective – nihilists.

These four metaphors can describe the psychological future of the human race. The not-man is the other, the alterity of man. If God created the man in his own image (Genesis 1.27), the not-man breaks from the pattern of the likeness: it is almost as if he was created by an acosmic God who no longer exists. We must note the not-man is not simply *anti-human* (a term we must use for the misanthropic anti-humanism of Lautréamont, who hoped for the destruction of the human race: “were the earth covered in lice like grains of sand on the seashore, the human race would be annihilated, stricken with terrible grief”²), he rather is *in-human*. It is more likely that the not-man is the being of the future, who looks back at the history of mankind and analyses it from a non-human perspective. If “man will be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”³, the not-man will be its *successor*. If the over-man were an alternate god, the not-man would be an alternate, estranged (*alienus*) man.

2. What Is Nihilism?

Perhaps a basic understanding of nihilism would be helpful for our task: “Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical *skepticism* that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have

¹ E.M. Cioran, *Amurgul gândurilor* (Twilight of Thoughts) (Bucharest: Humanitas Publisher House, 1996), 126, italics mine (my translation).

² Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror & The Complete Works*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1998), 83.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2005), 422.

no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy.”¹ There are at least two important traits of nihilism one can discern from Alan Pratt’s definition: the baselessness of values and the negativist “appetite for destruction”. Here is what Friedrich Nietzsche, the first important theoretician of nihilism, said about values: “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer ... Briefly: the categories ‘aim,’ ‘unity,’ ‘being’ which we used to project some value into the world – we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless*.”²

We can easily understand Nietzsche’s definition when we contextualize the affirmation “God is dead” with the attack against values of nihilism: God, the highest value of ontology, theology and even history has disappeared (has “devaluated itself”) and cannot, as Jean-François Lyotard and other postmodern thinkers have shown, serve as a source of legitimation. God, once the highest value, is now valueless. Moreover, nihilism could very well be defined as a project of destruction of society, as we learn from the novel which mentions for the first time in the history of literature the term “nihilist”, *Fathers and Sons* (1862) by Turghenev. Destruction, “the clearing of the ground” becomes almost religious, making up the meeting point between nihilism and anarchism:

“Nowadays the most useful thing of all is rejection—we reject.’

‘Everything?’

‘Everything.’ ...

‘But allow me,’ Nikolai Petrovich began. ‘You reject everything, or, to put it more precisely, you destroy everything ... But one must also build.’

‘That’s not for us to do ... First, the ground must be cleared.’ “³

We will come back to nihilism understood as *the being of destruction* at the end of the third chapter when we portray the overman as an active nihilist. For now one can observe that nihilism has two distinct sides: “A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism. B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism.”⁴ Anticipating, we must say that active nihilism is correspondent to Nietzsche’s overman and that passive nihilism is more likely to be applied to Cioran’s not-man. Cioran’s abhorrence of action places the Romanian philosopher closer to Schopenhauer and Buddha, in a nostalgic and melancholic territory where ambiguous nihilism seems to act against itself.

¹ Alan Pratt, “Nihilism”, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>, 01.08.2014.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9–13.

³ Ivan Turghenev, *Fathers and Sons*, trans. and ed. Michael R. Katz (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 38.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 17.

3. Nietzsche's Overman

One can reconstruct the definition of the overman by taking into consideration three fragments from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The first one: "What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape."¹

There is an *evolutionist mystique* in this text: the ape and the overman mark the limits of human evolution. The ape, metaphor for an ignoble past, when the animal soul was engaged in biological immediacy, is the human being fallen asleep. The ape is the term which best expresses *stagnation*, the radiography of the *minus human being* ("man is more ape than any ape"). The man is the achievement of the ape, an achievement so grand that makes the initial draft ridiculous. From an opposite perspective, the ape is a warning and a reminder for man. The warning says: "You can go back to subhumanity". The reminder: "Anything you do, the ape mirrors you". One must observe that it is impossible to build a mythology without constant reference to zoology.

Another relevant text for the configuration of the definition of the overman follows: "The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not." (*TSZ*, p. 125) We have here the second dimension of the overman: the faithfulness to earth and the understanding of the fact that otherworldly hopes are poisonous. These hopes are counterproductive, therefore infecting the will to power: while they create an imaginary world, they curse *this* very world. "To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful sin" (*TSZ*, p. 125). The worshippers of God took refuge in a transcendent world, therefore they neglect this world. Moreover they abandoned the existential idea of responsibility, claiming that this life is only a prelude to future "eternal" life. Now that "God died" and his worshippers "died with him" (*TSZ*, p. 125), the disciples of the overman can make the point that we must be faithful to this immanent earth and to the "here" and "now" of the earthly existence.

Now we can describe the third dimension of the overman: "Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him your great contempt can go under. What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust and even your reason and your virtue." (*TSZ*, p. 125) Two things have defined so far Nietzsche's overman: his ability to transcend the basic human being and his faithfulness to a sense of immanency. Now, in the "hour of the great contempt", the overman becomes an active nihilist, renouncing happiness, reason and virtue. This active nihilism claims that the avoidance of pain and the "compulsive" pursuit of happiness is a symptom of weakness: "What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth and wretched

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 124; hereafter abbreviated *TSZ*.

contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself.” (TSZ, p. 125) Something superior to the notion of happiness must serve as a fundamental drive. This percept sounds strange to any reader of Nietzsche: what else if not happiness may be our supreme motivation? Nietzsche’s answer is straightforward: (the will to) power is more fundamental and also has a higher finality than happiness.

To summarize, the overman may be defined through three terms: self-overcoming (man is overman’s ape), faithfulness to this world and existence (and conversely the existential realization that otherworldly hopes are poisonous) and active nihilism, as one can see from the destruction of the notion of happiness (“my happiness ... is poverty and filth”). We can redefine the overman as an *active nihilist*, who wishes to overcome humanity and forever renounces the Platonic and Christian delusion of the “other world”. “[Nihilism] reaches its maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction – as active nihilism... Nihilism does not only contemplate the ‘in vain!’ nor is it merely the belief that everything deserves to perish: one helps to destroy... It is the condition of strong spirits and wills, and these do not find it possible to stop with the No of ‘judgment’: their nature demands the No of the deed.”¹

The active nihilist has a huge “appetite for destruction”, which brings him an almost anarchistic trait of character: he no longer says No through judgment, he says No through action. The nihilist becomes the *being of destruction*, annihilating anything that “deserves to perish”. Here Nietzsche echoes Bakunin, who claimed that “the passion for destruction is a creative passion”.² However, one should remember what the German philosopher has written elsewhere: “Only as creators can we destroy!”³ Therefore, we can conclude that nihilism is *pre-anti-nihilism* for Nietzsche, a propedeutics for the future destruction of nihilism itself.

4. Cioran Against the Overman

There are at least three arguments against the Nietzschean overman, according to Cioran. First, the Romanian-French philosopher argues that Nietzsche “demolished so many idols only to replace them with others”.⁴ In other words, Cioran claims that the overman is a sort of God, an idol [*idole, Götze*] (a being at the level of gods, not something that shares a common essence with man). There is a fragment in Nietzsche, which supports the claim that the overman is an alternate God: “Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live” (TSZ, p. 191). However, we must not forget that the overman is “faithful to the earth” and committed against the poisonous Platonic other world, which means that the overman must be as immanent as the existing real human being. So, is the overman God-like or rather man-like? Probably both: the overman can be seen as a transgressor, as a being that creates beyond itself, while remaining in the same time a creature that has more in common

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 17–18.

² Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 57.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrain del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 70.

⁴ E.M. Cioran, *The Trouble of Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1976), 85.

with the blood and entrails of this earth than with the fantastic and dreamy character of divinity. Cioran claims that Nietzsche “observed men only from a distance. Had he come closer, he could have neither conceived nor promulgated the superman, that preposterous, laughable, even grotesque chimera, a crochet which could occur only to the mind without time to age, to know the long serene disgust of detachment”.¹



Irina Dumitrașcu Măgurean, *Untitled 03* (from the series *Anonymous*)
50 cm x 50 cm, photograph, 2013

The Romanian-French writer criticizes Nietzsche’s lack of psychological insight, suggesting that the German philosopher would not have invented the notion of overman had he really known the human nature. Nietzsche’s so-called “naïveté” springs – or so Cioran says – from his spiritual “adolescence” and from his

¹ E.M. Cioran, *The Trouble of Being Born*, 85.

enthusiastic attachment to mankind. Had he reached Cioran's age, Nietzsche would have renounced his pseudo-humanism and his nihilism and would have become a misanthropic skeptic. This is all really debatable and (of course) impossible to prove. Perhaps the German writer, if he were spared his mental breakdown, would have become more radical in his seniority and would have discovered a new fire in him, similar to the counter-cultural poets Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski, who kept their spirit young and were just as anxious and dissatisfied in their later works as before. Perhaps Nietzsche would have written in his sixties a *Counter-history of Philosophy*, after *Ecce Homo* and long before Michel Onfray. Perhaps he would have written a novel in the spirit of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, had he time to age. So I am arguing against Cioran's belief that Nietzsche's rebellious spirit would have fallen asleep while aging. The one who said not long before his mental collapse "I am not a man, I am dynamite"¹ could have become in different conditions a titanic activist and an even more important historical and political figure.

In an interview taken by George Carpat-Foche in 1992, Cioran brings yet another argument against the overman: "If we evoked the vices of animals, this only is enough to be repelled. The vices of man are, however, incomparably worse. An overman would have exceptional qualities, but also the disadvantages of those qualities and those disadvantages would be horrendous, incomparably more awful than the human ones."² The argument of the Romanian born philosopher goes against historical progress and evolution. To rephrase it in Nietzsche's terms from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a man is a work of art compared to an ape. However, he is also a devil compared to the naive ape, asleep in the night of spirit. Had Cioran been in Adam's shoes, he would have refused to touch the apple of knowledge and would have wished to remain forever in the Garden of Eden. In this context, to use a Nietzschean insight, to speak against the overman is to speak *for* the ape, to speak for both innocence and bondage. We must be frank: the vices of the overman may be horrendous, what about his virtues? From an aesthetical point of view the transgression toward overman is justified because this new species of *man* would be able to transfigure the face of Earth: "man must become better and more evil" (*TSZ*, p. 331).

A third argument against the overman can be found in *The Fall into Time* (1964): "To believe it his responsibility to transcend his condition and tend toward the superman is to forget that he has trouble enough sustaining himself *as man*, that mainspring, to the maximum."³ Actually this argument is quite commonsensical and could be rephrased in this way: When you try to overcome yourself, hoping to achieve absolute excellence, be careful not to lose contact with the deep and basic human energy, be careful not to become a *subman*. To put it otherwise, it is difficult enough to *be* a human being; it is dangerous to wish to become something far greater. When one "becomes who he is" (to use a Nietzschean principle), he must be careful to keep "becoming" and "being" in balance. As too much being produces

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo & The Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora, 2004), 90.

² E.M. Cioran, *Convorbiri cu Cioran (Conversations with Cioran)* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publisher House, 1993), 244.

³ E.M. Cioran, *The Fall into Time*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Seaver Books, 1976), 183.

stagnation, too much becoming brings chaos. What is the danger? To fall and to break, to become a “man” who loses not only superhumanity but also humanity, to become an “essence” not only without becoming but without actual being. In other words, the man who tended toward the overman but was defeated in his quest, losing both humanity and desired excellence, might fall “outside” the human species and become a *not-man*.

Cioran therefore believes that the overman is a concept that fails in three crucial points: he is an “idol” replacing another one (God); he would be much crueler and more vicious than man; moreover, when one tries to become an overman, one could lose his very humanity. But what would Nietzsche have said about Cioran’s *not-man*? Nietzsche could have argued that if one does not transcend the human race, one falls “outside” it, “disqualified as a human being”¹ and turning into *subman*. From a Nietzschean perspective, the not-man is the last man (“The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest” [TSZ, p. 129]). Moreover, seen through Nietzsche’s lenses, the *not-man* displays an attitude characteristic to Cioran, i.e. passive nihilism: “the weary nihilism that no longer attacks; its most famous form, Buddhism; a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness. The strength of the spirit may be worn out, exhausted, so that previous goals and values have become incommensurate and no longer are believed”.²

5. The Not-Man In Osamu Dazai’s Novel *No Longer Human*

Dazai’s novel begins with the description of three pictures of the main character of the book, the one whom we call a *not-man* in all his rights. The first picture was taken when he was a child. Although at first the boy seems a smiling regular ten year old, “the more carefully you examine the child’s smiling face the more you feel an indescribable, unspeakable horror creeping over you. You see that it is actually not a smiling face at all. The boy has not a suggestion of a smile. Look at his tightly clenched fists if you want proof. No human being can smile with his fists doubled like that. It is a monkey. A grinning monkey-face.” (NLH, p. 14) We have two ideas here: man feels horror and repugnance when he feels the proximity of the not-man. Moreover, for the ordinary human perception, the not-man is a subman, an animal, a “monkey” or a “toad”: “That is what I was – a toad. It was not a question of whether or not society tolerated me, whether or not it ostracized me. I was an animal lower than a dog, lower than a cat. A toad.” (NLH, p. 122) Perhaps what the Japanese writer seems to imply is that the not-man (i.e. the alterity, the other of man) must be hunted like a witch or sacrificed like a scapegoat. Like the Jews and the Gypsies in WW2, the not-man represents the projected shadow of the empowered and dominant individuals and cultures. There are no human rights for the not-man – like an alien, he is beyond protection.

Moving on to the second picture, taken while our character was a student, we see now that “he is ... extraordinarily handsome. But here again the face fails

¹ Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: New Direction Books, 1973), 166–167; hereafter abbreviated *NLH*.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 18.

inexplicably to give the impression of belonging to a living human being ... In fact, if you look carefully you will begin to feel that there is something strangely unpleasant about this handsome young man.” (*NLH*, p. 15) The young man began to adjust and tried to emulate the human being, hiding among enemies, in plain sight. However, there still is a great discrepancy between *persona* and *shadow* (to use Jungian terminology), or if you would like, between appearance and essence. Although he developed a mechanism of survival through *mimesis* (thinking the situation in Heideggerian terms, if one bowed to the they-self, this would take him under its wings), there is something in his essence, in his very core (the alien soul) that cannot ever emulate humans and begins to shatter once we take a closer look (*antimimesis*). We can see the face of the stranger, of the outsider, of the not-man passing like a dark cloud above our everyday blue sky.

We do not know when the third picture was taken but we can guess that it was shot towards his death, when the mask of the character disappeared and when his essence was truly revealed. For us “humans”, for the beings trapped in the comfortable prison of the they-self, this picture is disturbing: “The picture has a genuinely chilling, foreboding quality, as if it caught him in the act of dying as he sat before the camera ... the face is not merely devoid of expression, it fails even to leave a memory. It has no individuality ... I think that even a death mask would hold more of an expression, leave more of a memory. That effigy suggests nothing so much as a human body to which a horse’s head has been attached.” (*NLH*, pp. 16–17)

Until now we could only hint the not-man: now we almost have a working definition. Firstly, the not-man is a living dead, a being for whom non-existence takes precedence over existence, in other words a nihilist or a being who feels that “the living is only a form of what is dead”¹ and that being alive expresses death better than death itself would. For the not-man seen as a nihilist who favours non-existence, the wisdom of Silenus seems the absolute guide: “The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon.”² Why should one choose non-existence over existence? Because the Buddhist-Schopenhauerian equation states: life = pain.

Secondly, the not-man “has no individuality”, it is impersonal. Is this impersonality the one of death, the one of animality or the one that belongs to a different species? Perhaps the not-man looks like a being that has “zero” and “otherness” tattooed across his self, bearing the seal of nothingness. We come back to animality or better said to inhumanity: from the perspective of “man”, the not-man cannot be more than a subman. But how can we catch the suggestion of a being caught between animality, estrangement, death and nothingness? How do we see the unseen? In my perspective, Dazai’s not-man is beyond physical death (“even a death mask would hold more of an expression ...”) and can be recaptured at the realm of spiritual death. We can catch a glimpse of the not-man looking at the pictures of great spirits after they have lost their spirit, looking at the last photos of Nietzsche or

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 110.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy And Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. by Ronald Speirs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23.

Cioran. Following a familiar line of argument, one could say that insanity is more terrifying than death because it kills us while we still are alive.

The main affect of the not-man is *anthropophobia* (i.e. fear of man): “All I feel are the assaults of apprehension and terror at the thought that I am the only one who is entirely unlike the rest ... I had a mortal dread of human beings ... It is true, I suppose, that nobody finds it exactly pleasant to be criticized or shouted at, but I see in the face of the human being raging at me a wild animal in its true colors, one more horrible than any lion, crocodile or dragon ... I have always shook with fright before human beings ... I was frightened even by God. I could not believe in His love, only in His punishment ... The ‘world,’ after all, was still a place of bottomless horror.” (*NLH*, pp. 26, 28, 117, 133) The not-man feels like he is “the only one ... entirely unlike the rest”. There is no better description of the dissolution of the pattern of likeness. The peculiar being born at the border of humanity would fear both man and his God, whom are united through the discussed pattern. He is the *other*, the one we must keep either at the door or in the cage.

This pathologic fear, this passive nihilism leads only to suicide or madness, two versions of the same thing, death. “I want to die. I want to die more than ever before. There’s no chance now of recovery ... I want to die. I must die. Living itself is the source of sin” (*NLH*, pp. 163–164), writes Dazai’s main character, accessing the epistemology of the suicides, knowing what each of them knows in the enlightening moment of transgression, that life is not only torment, horror and pain but also a punishment and a disease. Dazai’s not-man continues to reflect in an access of self-consciousness uncharacteristic to committed psychopaths: “I was no longer a criminal – I was a lunatic. But no, I was definitely not mad. I have never been mad for even an instant. They say, I know, that most lunatics claim the same thing. What it amounts to is that people who get put into this asylum are crazy, and those who don’t are normal ... And now I had become a madman. Even if released, I would be forever branded on the forehead with the word ‘madman,’ or perhaps, ‘reject.’ Disqualified as a human being. I had now ceased utterly to be a human being.” (*NLH*, pp. 166–167)

We can almost say that asylums are the zoos where the human beings imprison the “others”, the inhumane ones, the not-men or the submen. Seen from this point of view, the “human” is a dictatorship which always enslaves, imprisons and destroys the exception. Who is to testify for the abuse against the “other”? Probably suicides, madmen and strangers and outsiders, the so-called inferior spiritual race, the ones who supported the genocide of dominant mankind. Cioran and Dazai, their ideas and their characters, introduce a new concept (the one of psychological inhumanity), which could make a career in anthropology, not only in philosophy and psychology.

6. The Overman and the Not-Man Facing Authenticity and Death

One can minimally define authenticity as a test of our own individuality, as the quality of being true to ourselves. Emerson’s definition from *Self-Reliance* is one of the best introductions in this domain: “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind... No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my

constitution, the only wrong what is against it.”¹ In Emerson’s vision authenticity can be understood as a sort of *autonomy* (*self-law* in its etymological construction): no one else has to govern us, to impose us a law “foreign” to our nature. The autonomy of individuality is almost anomic (“my law as opposed to the objective law: my law transcends their law”), and therefore, somehow a(n)ti-social (“I am my own Master and not the they-self”). Charles Guignon is one of the most interesting theoreticians that observed this feature of authenticity: “To be authentic is to be in touch with something that is concealed to the people who accept the outlook of society. At some level, to be authentic is already to be asocial. What is more, being authentic involves having a personal ‘take’ on reality that is ‘Other’ to the social, a deeper reality that is masked by social customs.”² Moreover, the American philosopher claimed that “everyone is an artist, because each person creates his or her own life, and each person has the ability to create it as a work of art.”³

How can we consider the overman in the light of two of authenticity’s components, autonomy and self-creation? We keep in mind that we have defined the overman as (1) a transcending individual, capable of overcoming the “human being fallen asleep”, (2) a person with a sense of immanency, faithful to this very life and world, (3) an active nihilist, who chooses (the will to) power instead of happiness, reason and virtue. The overman *is* authentic because he has to create his own destiny in pure immanence, in the absence of God, the former source of legitimation. He no longer can take God as a model, in him “existence precedes essence”, as Jean-Paul Sartre has put it. He is “condemned to be free”, he is forced to forge a new being, which broke from the aforementioned pattern of likeness. Moreover, he is not only being but also transgressive “becoming”: he must be of this world but also beyond this existence, faithful to immanence and transcending humanity. How does an overman look like? We are yet to find out.

If the overman were potentially authentic, would we rush to consider the not-man inauthentic? The not-man was defined as an “alternate man”, a “passive nihilist”, a “subman”. If the overman were the *higher other* of man, the not-man would be the *lower other* or maybe the *other’s other*, the radical alterity one also fails to imagine. But perhaps it is fundamentally wrong to view the not-man through the hermeneutical lenses of the overman. What does Cioran’s affirmation stand for: “I was man and I no longer am now”? If we transcended humanity and became overmen, absolute “beings of destructions” and active nihilists, we would still have a region for our transformation: we would become alternate gods, probably the human beings of the future, the post-humans that combine technology and computer science with basic human traits. But if we transgressed humanity and became not-men, there would be no region for our development: we would be crucified in pure nothingness, in the utter unnamable. We would become something else for which there is no name, because the *not-man* is only an approximation. So, keeping this in mind, the not-man is not inauthentic but the bearer of a strange dark authenticity: the overman

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 21–22.

² Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2004), 40.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

is autonomous and gives his own “sacred” law and so is the not-man, who gives little regard to “they-self” or “persona”, knowing that he is – not superior but – completely different. If the overman were antisocial, the not-man would be asocial: both are isolated and true to their anomic and abnormal “nature”.

When these two versions of (in)humanity are facing death, what do they become? We ought to say that we are thinking of existential death, one which is divorced from the vulgarities of the biological phenomenon. A certain human being and even a certain God have to die in order for the overman to live. In other words, the overman has to kill the humanity and even the potential divinity from himself, in order to become himself. This death could be an existential condition for the beings of the future post-history: they must go beyond themselves in order to become alternate (high-tech or digital) gods. One must also view death as transformation, as mythology and religion teach us: true life begins only after the first “death”. The ones who fail to integrate the initiation of this first “death” are doomed to a life of ignorance and sleep. If the overman “stepped upon death” and as an alternate god enjoyed a sort of spiritual immortality, the not-man (in Dazai’s version) would be (spiritually) dead while still alive, he would be a living dead. For him, as we have shown, “being alive expresses death better than death itself would”. If the overman died as man in order to live completely as a post-human being, for the not-man death would hold no surprise: he would be sworn to death in life, an existence dedicated to paralyzing consciousness, to “sickness unto death” and to the agony of passive nihilism. The not-man cannot die anymore: he is condemned to (eternal) life because his very existence symbolizes death. A similar life is virtual (immanent) damnation, a condemnation to the inferno of “here and now”, the work of the last man or Sisyphus: this is basically death in life. And while the not-man is doomed to this dying existence, the overman is the inheritor of the life (“la Vita nuova” as Dante has put it) which begins after the first “death”. One is created for a dead life, the other is called for a deathless existence.

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