

How We've Become Not-Men

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Abstract

Cioran's concept of the not-man seems fit for a psychological mutation of the species similar to Nietzsche's genealogy of the over-man. I investigate in this paper the definition of the ambiguous concept, sketching a brief history of the deaths of the man and God, and seeing the not-man as the being of apocalypse.

1. Theory

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*: "I am not proud to be a man, because I know only too well what it is to be man. Only those who have not experienced this state intensely are proud of it, because they intend to become men. Their delight is natural: 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*". (Cioran 1992, 68-9, Cioran's emphasis)

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 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 toward 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?

One notes that man is no longer an "immutable entity", and that the human being is in the process of becoming something else. I believe that I can locate this change in the late 19th century: the death of God brought along a certain death man (as Foucault, Deleuze, Berdyaev, and Shestov argue in different contexts). Take for instance the post-Romantic subject who can no longer identify himself or herself with the "ego sum qui sum", God's identity with himself. The post-Romantic subject "is what is not" (not unlike Iago), and would probably identify with Milton's "myself am Hell" rather than Sartre's "hell is other people". I believe that this change can be seen as a consequence of post-Schopenhauerian philosophy (Nietzsche and also Mainländer). This *split*, this *death of a world* and *death of a type of subject* is obvious in Cioran's concept of the not-man: the human is changing and longer is what he/she is. From a psychological perspective, the not-man would be a psychopath. From a mythological perspective – the not-man is the titan, the *other* of the gods. From a theological perspective, he or she is comparable to the devil. And from a philosophical perspective, he or she would be the nihilist: a being who denies but, at the same time, as the second reviewer observes, affirms his or her denial, a being caught in the space between the *no* of active nihilism and the *yes* of post-nihilism (a being who may be able to create more than his or her destruction, to paraphrase Bakunin).

Therefore, I propose we use the concept of *antihumanism* in a different sense than Foucault, having developed this new meaning in previous papers (Bolea 2018, 53, Bolea 2015, 33-4). Foucault alluded to the death of man in *The Order of Things* (1966) as the downfall of a certain way of conceiving the human being and the advent of a non-humanistic system of reference. Nevertheless, poets such as Baudelaire and Lautréamont, and philosophers such as Nietzsche and Cioran add misanthropy (hatred against mankind) to their antihumanistic project. These postromantic poets and philosophers see themselves as agents of destruction (of what Nietzsche called "active nihilism") and would like to finish with the saga of humanism through a Schopenhauerian process of universal death. Moreover, Nietzsche's overman (a sort of transgression, an overcoming of the traditional man) and Cioran's not-man (a psychological mutation of the species, a being who is human only from a biological perspective) are possible versions of mankind's evolution. The Cioranian not-man might be a subtler and more complicated term than the overman: they are both "beings of overcoming" but if Nietzsche's term has a vertical and a certain utopian quality, Cioran's notion raises the pessimistic problem of a more dystopian transgression of mankind. The not-man is the infernal abyss of the overman: the *not-man* ceases to be human ("I was man and I no longer am now," observes Cioran (1996, 126)) but cannot aspire to the heroic status of the overman. The not-man is a sort of shadow of the ideal, a Plutonian being relegated to the netherworld. The not-man could fail even worse than the human being because its status is more intricate and ambiguous: "I am no longer human ... What will I become?" In a manuscript written when he was 18, "About Christianity" (1929), Cioran seems to intuitively anticipate Foucault's antihumanism. If "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault 2005, 422), the Romanian philosopher notes that "As a wave in the undulation of the sea, man is a transient and perishable form of matter" (Cioran 2012, 845).

2. A Brief History of Mankind

1. "I is God"

The ego is in a state of psychosis, failing to recognize himself or herself. On one hand, God represents everything he/she despises, on the other, he/she feels the inevitability of turning into God. Pure identity is the destiny of the ego ("I am who I am"), even if this identity includes the possibility of being who is not. Schizo-identity, para-identity, dis-identity. From "I am myself" to "I am another" and, further, to "I am all", there are only small steps. If autarchy becomes extreme, the God, the world, and the other are all substituted by the ego. "Rather be a god oneself!" (Nietzsche 1982, IV, 'Retired'). God "no longer constitutes an obstacle to the outburst of other gods" (Cioran 2013, 31). "Without / there is no time, there is no space, there is no God, without eyes there is no light, without hearing there is no singing; the eye is the world, the hearing is the song, the / is God" (Eminescu, 1958, 638). "Here comes the New God./ I am the New God." (OOMPH!, 1992).

2. "God is dead"

What happens when you become a God and you find out that He is dead? *Contra* John Donne, gods do indeed die and only death is immortal. When everything will have died, death will become dwarfish; nevertheless, she won't stop scanning for signs disturbing the tranquility of nothingness. Isn't it troublesome to feel that you are a dead God? Perhaps now you may experience advanced

degrees of madness: God complex and Cotard syndrome in one. The only possible way in which you can experience God is within yourself. Can the inner God still live after the death of God? But enough with the age of dichotomy. God, the anti-God, lifelessness, and life: a third is needed, or maybe a fourth.

3. "Man is dead"

Without God, man is a shriveled tree, an ape that forgot his way back to the zoo. God died and maybe the man has even expired before him.

4. What now?

"Let him go, he's gone." (Nietzsche 1982, IV, 'Retired'). Let yourself go. Let the new Columbus explore & explode.

3. The End of the End

We are at the end, but haven't we always been here? The overman is the only being able to put up with the eternal return, precisely because the eternal return is basically hell: each joy is paid with countless pains. Furthermore, as I have argued before, I have the most unreasonable conception that there may be infernos-in-themselves without any reference to the idea of heaven. Some have ears for the pure music of damnation from the tenth circle. Some are fit to reside in the limitless desert of Year Zero. Some do not cherish the sweet fruits of life, being accustomed to living as dead and even thriving in their prison cells.

We all want the same things, they say. What if death is what we want?

Not to die death, but to live it.

Not to love, but to love as hate.

"Nobility is only in the negation of existence, in a smile that surveys annihilated landscapes"
(Cioran 1972, 36).

"Maybe the honorable thing for our species to do is deny our programming, stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction one last midnight – brothers and sisters opting out of a raw deal"
(Pizzolatto 2014).

"If the face of the earth were covered with lice as the sea-shore is covered with grains of sand, the human race would be destroyed, a prey to dreadful pain. What a sight! With me, motionless on my angel wings in the air to contemplate it!" (Lautréamont 1978, 92)

"Deathlike time spreads its arms and becomes eternity."
(Eminescu 1993, 125-6)

"Only the sleep eternal/ In an eternal night."
(Swinburne 2000, 139).

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