A Hominist Manifesto: Anthropology, Utopia and Ethics

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This article is not an anthropological analysis of a utopia. It is an anthropological utopia: on what anthropology could be, its educational and ethical role, and on the world it can create. One cannot be radical without running the risk of a certain naivety, hoping—as Kant wrote (Kant 2006: beginning p. 67)[1]—for a world without war, a world in which all peace treaties ban war, a world without armies, a world in which the courage to wage war and support war is not exalted, a world without terror in the name of divinities or territories, a world without hungry children, a world in which every situation demonstrates that tolerance is the mark of humanity (Voltaire 2010: beginning p. 302), also a world where everyone remembers that they themselves were once children who played, who loved toys. This means hoping for a world where it is extremely important to protect every singularity in the name of its existence, to cultivate the emotional feeling that when babies grow up they should not go hungry, become terrorists, kill or be killed in the name of various values. The possibility that this world could exist feeds the hope that all human beings could reconnect with their humanity in order to be reconciled with the essentials: the differentiation of individuals and each person's unique identity. Then, behind each singularity would lie the possibility of a new way of existing in reaction to those who contradict, divert or trample on what makes us human beings. Going beyond these frightening realities means considering and adopting another perspective for humans in general, as well as for anthropology. We are therefore opening the door to a new existential utopia that finds a place alongside other utopias imagined by researchers in the human and social sciences, such as the sociological utopia (Elias 2014),[2] the cultural utopia (Levitas 2011), microtopias (Sansi 2014), real utopias (Wright 2010; Cooper 2014) or concrete utopias (McGuire 2011). The nature of the link we are establishing between an existential utopia and anthropology distinguishes our view from these propositions. These forms—from a sociogenesis of utopias rooted in the social or cultural *topos* to utopian projections implemented in limited environments—do not set out to articulate a new role for anthropologists such as us, with the humans that surround us. This articulation is essential in order to lay the foundations for a world in which the anthropologist would have a role to play and every individual would rediscover his or her singularity.

We accept the naivety and the risk involved in playing the prophet and in being seen as ridiculous, but we prefer this to the discomfort of not saying what we think. The subject of 'improvements' is out of place in our time. Social and political improvement is a recurring theme, the technical improvement of the human body is very contemporary, with its

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[1] On the contemporary promotion of Kantian ethics in anthropology, see Hart (2010), also Wardle (2010).
[2] Discussed in a lecture delivered in 1986.

accompanying ethical debates. But do these carry any weight in the face of murderous violence? What we wish to consider here is a radical improvement in the way people exist.

There would be no reason to present this text—which is written like a manifesto, in the tone of a manifesto—in an anthropological journal if we did not think that anthropology could play an important role in the creation of what we call 'hominist ethics'. We call it hominist because it directly concerns human beings and is connected with anthropological knowledge of *Homo sapiens* and its evolutionary transformations. What is at stake is a true passion for humanity, an intellectual passion for *anthropos* in comparison with all living things, and a moral and emotional passion with regard to the atrocities that humans manage to commit. In this article, we will make a distinction between, on the one hand, what, based on anthropology, triggered our thought—an interpretation of the difference between the Neanderthal and *Homo sapiens*—and on the other hand, the underlying principles of hominist ethics, which are themselves also connected with anthropological knowledge and practice. Hominist human beings have four traits: they are singularists, 'noters', lucid and tolerant. Let us start with a scenario of their origins.

The story of how it all started: who are these *Homo sapiens?*

When examining human specificity, social and cultural anthropology broadly focuses on the sociocultural dimension. In the scenarios of origin occasionally presented by anthropology, the originality of human beings is linked to rules, norms and prohibitions, to mechanisms of exchange and transmission. The existence of the first human beings, as evoked by Morgan, Malinowski or Lévi-Strauss, is presented either as a rupture for the sake of survival, made possible by an increase in cerebral powers, or as a continuation transformed by human complexity and a capacity for openness that has replaced inflexible animal behaviors. In any case, from the outset, human beings were well and truly sociocultural human beings, sometimes conquerors of order and creators of traditions, sometimes always-already part of a system of constraints that get the better of them. This has provided the social sciences – sociology or social anthropology – with the foundations of their research.

But who are these *Sapiens*? We think one of the key elements of the human mode of living is the rarity of lively thoughts and of consciousness about what the individual is doing, will do, or will no longer do, about what is happening around him, including atrocities and death. These words of Pascal ring very true: 'That something so obvious as the vanity of the world should be so little recognized that people find it odd and surprising to be told that it is foolish to seek greatness; that is most remarkable' (Pascal 1995: 5). What can surprise an anthropologist? Social life; but this exists among most animals! Cultural differences? Why not? The origin of intelligence and reflexive consciousness? No doubt! What most fascinates us is precisely the everyday suspension of lucidity that can occasionally be effected by intelligence and consciousness. Not really thinking, thinking but not too much, suppressing thought, but without effort, without really being aware of it. Lethargy, restriction, detachment, reserve or hesitation, hypoconsciousness, hypolucidity. Hypo: not only through the effect of the automaticity of habits, of natural continuity, but also through the effect of a new cognitive

ability that leads to living as a human being. This is our hypothesis. Modes of being present are what are characteristic of human beings.

For 100,000 years, probably more, human beings, *Homo sapiens,* have been living with the risks of intelligence, consciousness (especially reflexive consciousness), the ability to know what they are doing, and the ability to conceive of passing time and death – the deaths of others as well as their own deaths, which they know they cannot escape. Perhaps it is this risk and its consequences that Neanderthals succumbed to, but *Homo sapiens* avoided. What happened? It can be said that animals live in a world in which perception and action are carried out without much gestural or cognitive laterality, without surrounding details. The species of the *Homo* genus have for their part gradually developed forms of distance from the immediacy of the situation that are more perceptual and behavioral than existential, thanks to their habitat, to the presence of objects, and to the use of material signs, identity marks and recognition marks. And here arises the particular and fascinating case of Neanderthals, which can teach us a lot about the specificity of *Sapiens*. Their lives testify to the presence of burials indicating consciousness of time and death. Could this capacity for lucidity have been hampered by the fact that they were unable to defuse their consciousness of death, something that might explain their long evolutionary stagnation? In short, they were excessively and insufficiently intelligent! Could the failure of Neanderthals have been to know they were mortal, to be 'too' conscious of their mortality?

Neanderthal Man, who knows he is going to die, thus takes care of corpses. This would be our scenario of origin: many prehistorians – not all of them – agree that, contrary to preconceived ideas, Neanderthal burials are not accompanied by offerings.[3] However, a survey of *Homo sapiens* burials contemporaneous with those of Neanderthals does not rule out the possibility of offerings. On this basis, our hypothesis is to associate *Homo sapiens* with a specific ability that did not develop in the Neanderthals: to imagine a dead person as still alive – not just as a former living being, but as someone living a new life. Offerings are a sign – an uncertain one, of course – of belief in this new life after death, or at least of belief in unbelievable statements, those that require the cognitive ability to associate two contradictory qualities, for example, death and life. Thus *Homo sapiens* were or became capable of producing statements that combine contradictory categories (the dead person is alive, or the stone is a spirit), to which they started to give a kind of consent. So let's say that they believe in it: 'And what if he were still alive! And what if it were true!'. The act of believing has just appeared, as has, at the same time – and above all – the need not to carry one's understanding of this statement all the way to its conclusion, to accept its uncertainty.

Thus the life of *Homo* would have changed. It is at that point that everything would have shifted. Human beings accept uncertainty, not fully understanding those contradictory statements, not looking any further. From that moment, they learn semi-consciousness and cognitive loosening. Imagine day-to-day life in a space–time in which reserve and distance are learned and gradually become new cognitive skills for human beings, who also develop

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[3] See the work of Steven Mithen (1996), also Ian Tattersall (1998), Wynn and Coolidge (2004). And see Piette (2015b) for further references.

them in other areas of activity or thought. The ability to accept indecision, not to take things literally, but also – and no doubt unfortunately – not wanting to be conscious, not facing up to things, becomes more widespread. Another world starts to develop.

The act of believing would therefore have encouraged a new cognitive aptitude, a mental loosening that was able to spread into all of human activities. It corresponds to a hypolucid mode of being connected with the mental and discursive association of implausible things. Human beings would have just learned to use consciousness minimally: from then on, the individual would have known to what extent he could be conscious and what he could be conscious of. Without sufficient support to face up to cognitive tension, Neanderthal Man lacked not so much reassuring divinities but rather hypolucidity. Unlike what we so often read, we cannot say that human beings, modern humans, have effected a triumphant departure from animality. If there has been a departure, it is relative to other species of *Homo*, and there is nothing triumphant about this departure since the success of humans (or at least their survival up until now) has been achieved through a cognitive loosening. But while religious statements generated this new mode of life, they inspired a kind of solace and created the need for humans to stabilize, secure and transmit them. This generated the risk of entrenching, and therefore of absolutizing, forgetting that it is only a belief in an implausible statement because human beings have just learned to suspend, to delay, and therefore to forget, to avoid thinking too much. Without this minimality, would human beings have been able to invent collective beings and everything else? Such is the minor mode of human life, an original way of being present in the world.

How should this scenario of origin be read and interpreted? It could correspond to a historical reality—we do not rule that out. It could, as Rousseau (Rousseau 2013 [1755]) suggested, be considered a hypothesis that could serve as a basis for examining the present, seeing the distance that separates humans from this described situation. Why? It would be possible to distinguish three phases:

First phase: Sapiens and Neanderthal are different, particularly in their cerebral anatomy, cognitive connections and vocal organs. The potential of these differences is not really actualizing yet. Both *Homo* are conscious of themselves and of time. They know they will die, in a difficult lucidity and tension. The lives of both are tense, 'untranquil'.

Second phase: Sapiens leave offerings in burials, invent contradictory statements ('the dead person is alive') and then start thinking that a dead person can still be alive, corresponding to an existing referent. They know they invented this type of statement and have doubts as to its realistic impact. They doubt, they believe, they start believing while still doubting. This gradually moves them to suspend their usual requirement of verification and understanding.

Third phase: Sapiens get ensnared by the comforts of indifference and passivity. They acquire a taste for mental relaxation and learning indifference. This relaxation also enables creativity and the development of culture, technology and politics (over a period of a few thousand years), whereas Neanderthals vanish from the earth. This is not to say that other factors did not play a part in these developments.

Neanderthals did not undergo the second and third phases. There is also reason to believe that they left objects in burials, and that these were possibly associated with a sentimental and emotional value, without generating a contradictory statement and the act of believing in it. Neanderthals kept having the need to understand, to know before accepting, whereas accepting would have been natural and more obvious for Sapiens at the risk of falling into error, unimpeded as they were by possible contradictions, by the unverifiable and unfalsifiable. And do Sapiens not believe too much? It is as if passivity prevailed over doubt and uncertainty. This was at the cost of a reduction in lucidity.

In various writings (for example, Piette 2015a, 2015b), our ethnographic descriptions have often stressed the consistency, to varying degrees, of the presence-absence of human beings, the human ability to be here and elsewhere, to be here and thinking about something else, to be here and doing something else, to be not very attentive, to be not 'really' here or there. This is something that would support wide-ranging, endless, bustling activity, which is all the more remarkable in light of this potential for lucidity. Have human beings—potentially so lucid—reached the point of forgetting themselves in this way? There is a great risk of resting too much, of not wanting to know, of accepting.

Each living species presents various characteristics. Humans have this in particular: that they give their assent to things that they have imagined, that they have invented. Giving one's assent means believing, thinking that these things existed before they were imagined or invented. It is not a very common characteristic. It testifies to a capacity for credulity that implies another one, namely not seeing, not knowing and not wanting to know this operation: that these invented things have been invented and do not exist in the other world in which they are placed. This mode of being has not always existed, and it may not always exist over the course of the 4 or 5 billion years that separate us from the explosion of the universe. When thinking about this specificity—with its origins in relatively recent time (about 100,000 years ago) and its limited duration—it can generate a feeling of amazement, not just at the extreme violence committed in the name of inventions, but also at the suffering experienced, all of the preoccupations to which humans abandon themselves day and night, and the sadness that everyone feels at the loss of things and beings that are felt to be singular. This is one of the characteristics of the human species: not knowing, not wanting to know, being passive. It also means having lost—by leaning upon various supports like divinities and institutions—the feeling of amazement that there is nothing but the singular, this one, that one. This passivity linked to a lack of lucidity also makes it possible to be inattentive to others, whom we deal with in a state of agitation. In a way, humans have forgotten how to marvel at presence, at the fact that each person is there and will soon no longer exist. Faced with this state of affairs, what can anthropology offer?

Attention to singularity

An anthropology of human beings is far from obvious, given the constant absence of humans in the history of social and cultural anthropology. Implicitly or explicitly, this field usually explores cultures, the separation between cultures, by dividing the work into cultural areas, through scientific programs and through the institutionalization of research teams. Such

has been the anthropological tradition for over a century, and as Keith Hart (2013) reminds us, it has not changed much, neither in its methodologies nor in its interests, which continue primarily to emphasize societies without electricity. The so-called ontological turn of recent years, which rejects every kind of naturalism and extends the construction principle to the physical sphere, looks to us like an intensification of this underlying culturalism. The position and function of the now-porous boundary between nature and culture fluctuates according to the culture (Descola 2013). Some have not omitted to condemn this as an essentialism of cultural differences (Palecek and Risjord 2013), or at least condemn the risk of backing up thought in terms of radical differences, those of the native or autochthonous people thus grouped into cultural sets. According to French philosopher Frédéric Nef: 'This argument challenges the very possibility of an opposition between physical beings and social beings. By going down the slope of this cultural relativism, one can be led to assert that, in a culture in which fairies haunt isolated fountains, they are natural beings' (2009: 56).

Anthropology operates based on a Platonic model: human beings are not interesting, and true reality lies elsewhere, in cultures, structures, the unconscious, actions, relations and even ontology. Today's anthropologists think that the idea of *anthropos* is untenable (Henare et al. 2007: 10). In their view, the legacy of the socio-structuralist paradigm is not far away, and human beings still depend on a variability in the contingent phenomena to which they are subjected—classes, social institutions, cultural transmission, historicity, etc. According to their own methods, most disciplines determine which properties they consider '*essential*: a certain individual trait that is essential in the view of sociologists (social origins) will be considered inessential by psychologists; another trait that is essential in the eyes of ethnologists (marriage between cross cousins) is only accidental in the view of psychoanalysts' (Wolff 2014: 19). Anthropology is perhaps the only discipline which thinks that its subject of study does not exist: the human being. Geographers think space exists, organization specialists think organization exists, sociologists think societies exist, and theologians think God exists. Are human beings so disgusting that they are unwanted as the root subject of an anthropology—preference being given today to nonhumans, nature, the planet, preference having been given yesterday to cultures and social relations—to the extent that anthropologists feel reassured when humans are presented as dissolved into nexuses, sets and networks?

Then whose task is it to study humans, without dispersing and losing them in a set of properties, to study the singularity of each of them and the continuity of existence? Relative to plants and animals, humans have attained a high level of individuation. This is obvious. Humans know they exist, that their existence belongs to them, that each of them is unique and that only death will put an end to them. 'The young Nietzsche saw in this "mourning play" (which is in fact the German name for tragedy, *Trauerspiel*) the combination of a consciousness of the horror of a human life destined for death and the dream of an Olympian world inhabited by gods' (Dastur 1996: 14-15). The ultimate question of an anthropology of existences would be: what does it mean to be this man with that knowledge? Hence the importance of individualized, detailed observation of degrees of consciousness and obliteration, degrees of engagement and disengagement, forms of active and passive presence.

This implies examining states that are inherent in the individual and that are fluid when observed continually over several experienced situations. This confrontation of a situation or specific moment is that during which the individual continually densifies. The observer should not pre-select any situation for the sake of relevant elements likely to support a selective analysis.

From this perspective, the operation that 'sameifies' or associates individuals is the very antithesis of an anthropology. Beyond social strata that are incorporated but, as a whole, create a singular stylistic effect, beyond the relational capital stored in a volume of being, beyond gestures and words appropriate to a situation, there is the obvious fact that the singularity of existence cannot be shared. There is also the attachment that everyone feels for their own particular existence. This being the case, what is a person like when in the process of writing, speaking, eating or drinking? Not focusing on points like these almost amounts to committing an error of type.

A human is primarily an empirical unit that is separate from all others and never identical. Its constituent set of molecules is the foundation of a system that is perpetually ageing and therefore constantly changing. Every individual is unique from the biological point of view, but also from an existential perspective. Existence is by definition private and inseparable from oneself. It is that of an empirical unit; it is itself the empirical unit, the singular, continual assembling of more or less shared facets—desires, values, social relations, self-image, etc. It is the complexity and richness of this ephemeral assemblage that makes humans singular. It is up to anthropology and anthropology alone to consider human beings as human beings, to observe them as such, and not primarily as social and cultural entities (Piette 2015a). Anthropologists should observe the individual as he exists, that is to say, as he appears, the individual who is there, goes out, the individual who continues, a reality that lives and is also lived. Among philosophers, Levinas gave remarkable expression to this principle of separation (though he was not the only one): 'We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships' (Levinas 1987: 42). This is a principle in which the social sciences are deeply anchored. Levinas continues: 'All these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I *am* not the other. I am all alone' (ibid.). Thus each person is riveted and chained to himself, sensing that he is an existence, knowing it and speaking about it, feeling what causes his body to be his own body and his thoughts to be his own thoughts.

Anthropologists can teach this singularist position to everyone, and not just to anthropologists. Who is amazed that each empirical unit is singular? In the flow of situations, humans have no time for this amazement. There are even social forms of attention, institutionalized forms that develop in minimal ways, which are certainly sufficient in social situations and are pleasing to their beneficiaries. Being routinized, they in turn risk not requiring that each person's singularity, life, uniqueness and fragility be taken into account. An essential element of hominist ethics is this: 'Oh, you human, I am looking at you because soon you will no longer exist...' Is this unbearable? But precisely, this could specifically be the anthropological view or the hominist view: he who seeks the singularity of each human being, only to find his fragility.

Human eyes are accustomed to a gestaltic, global, general vision. Anthropologists want to encourage another way of looking at things: isolating a figure, seeing him in the singular and in detail. They allow themselves to take an interest in every detail, in the very existence of this figure. Singularity is sometimes said to be unbearable and indescribable, but is this difficulty not due to evolutionary formatting? We know the importance of specifically social forms of cognition, capable of detecting relational and situational signs with a view to inferring the behavior of others, and we know about our cognitive system's sensitivity to the social properties of our environment, its ability to process social information (Kaufmann, Clément, 2007). Our brain was prepared for abilities like these, selected in the course of evolution. The ability to detect relations, pinpoint groups and build alliances is better rooted in the history of evolution than the ability to perceive singularities. The sociopolitical era of the living generated significant changes for the life of human beings, but also limitations.

Being a noter

Writing, the act of noting, would be one support for activating a singularist way of existing while at the same time tempering the risk of lucidity in the face of everyone's fragility. This act of writing about oneself or about each other individual is not simple: it must be learned. This can be done in a university anthropology course, but from a hominist perspective this learning process is crucial for all individuals. Lucid anthropologists who place much ethical hope in the view taken of each person would have to set an example by integrating their way of being noters into their thoughts.

The message of lucid anthropology is that every human is an existent being. It is up to anthropologists to use their concern for observation and detail to teach everyone to speak or write about their existence, about that of each other person, to think about being a singular, irreducible I, and to help them consider the fact that everyone else is also a singular I, to learn to talk about themselves, write about themselves and look at every other 'self'. Writing, photographing, filming, recording, noting situations, moments or people: it is as if part of the observer's know-how—consisting in watching, observing, noting and describing—has been transferred into the singularist perspective. Being a noter: this is the anthropologist's job, and one of the key elements of hominist life.

Anthropologists could become anthropo-analysts, observers of existences, not listeners of stories. 'Being analysed', psychoanalysts say. 'Being anthropologized' anthropologists of existence would say. Everyone would have their anthropo-analyst! The anthropologist could be summoned in the final moments of life (but not only then) to describe and save traces, to teach people to look and write. A new profession: anthropologist, anthropo-analyst, with his 'professional' side in addition to his 'scientific' side. One could pay an anthropologist for an anthropography! Just as people used to get their portraits taken in a photographer's studio.. We are convinced that anthropology is yet to be invented: creating a virtual space of archived singularities, digitizing one's own life with the help of mounted cameras, following and filming the existence of others. The web abounds with examples of experiments like these. A

father films his son over several years, a few seconds each day, each week. Tour de France racers switch on their mounted cameras. The lives of cats are also tracked, as they wear tiny cameras capable of recording their movements and points of view. To this end, one could use a set of cameras, microphones, GPS devices and other equipment like very small detectors that can be implanted in the body (Bell, Gemmel, 2009).

At the centre of hominism, this anthropological viewpoint can only be realized by setting aside the apprehension of commonalities and the togetherist interpretation that favours interpretating individuals in terms of belonging or relational effects. Existence is what remains when these marks of belonging, of trajectories and of relations have been removed, while still enabling them to be reintegrated in their rightful place.

Knowing arbitrariness

This is another point of hominism: knowledge of origins, which is another form of lucidity. Human beings are profoundly quotidian. The educational injection of a dose of knowledge and lucidity into presence is no doubt essential to avoid an imbalance of passivity or bustling activity, as we have seen. The right dosage needs to be proportioned also in order to avoid hypersensitivity. Discussions of political or moral philosophy, ethics and education should not avoid the exploration of lucidity, knowledge and especially its receptivity.

Then what are we? A mixture of activity and passivity, of criticism certainly, but also and especially of blunted lucidity, as shown by the scenario of origin. Of course, relaxation is fruitful, it even makes art and science possible. It also makes it possible to bustle about bizarrely in a shopping centre on a Saturday afternoon and accept television advertisements. And also to kill on the orders of others. Believers turned soldiers: this is the mark that *Sapiens* will leave behind of themselves. In our view, it is essential to teach human beings not to misjudge the arbitrariness in everything that surrounds them, in their beliefs, culture, gods and states. Knowing origins necessarily means knowing the arbitrariness of things. It is also important for everyone to remember that every symbol and every hierarchy of goods is an invention.

Our scenario of origin taught us that the act of believing and its associated relaxation generated new abilities: believing, not really believing it or thinking it, but becoming passive, absolutizing and also organizing and suffering a collective violence. When human beings start accepting not following things literally, therefore distancing themselves from them, they run the risk of distancing themselves too much and therefore accepting everything, not thinking, etc. In this case, absolutizing and accepting a state or a god means fundamentally not thinking that one is absolutizing or accepting while still absolutizing and accepting, against a backdrop of oblivion, of non-thought, of the lethargy of performed actions. Bustling proselytism and passive following unite in this oblivion. Is it not on the basis of this lethargy that human beings are able to kill in the name of religious and political ideas? From the observation of withdrawal and lethargic consciousness, one must retain that they are, to a certain extent, a necessity in the human balance, but that they also lie at the root of excessive 'withdrawals' that make it possible to kill and be killed in the name of an imposed absolute. What is

therefore necessary is a knowledge of beginnings, of the circumstantial arbitrariness of all beginnings. This implies the possibility of at least remembering that gods were invented by human beings, and that it cannot be peremptorily asserted that gods existed prior to this invention – a God that orders acts. On packs of cigarettes there is a warning that they kill. Moderate smokers also read it. Should there be a warning at the top of religious books and in religious buildings that God, who does not exist, can kill?

Is it therefore necessary to state the obvious: God does not exist? We think that one must posit this non-existence as the major principle of every hominist position, and therefore one should not consider all opinions valid, from religious ideas to atheistic points of view. It is well-known that Bertrand Russell saw religious ideas as false and harmful (Russell 2004), even if it is important to take account of the evolutionary impact we have attributed to them. In our view, radical remarks by intellectuals are quite rare today, especially by anthropologists, who are often ensnared by cultural populism, with their essentialist discourse on the radical difference between worlds and on respect for other people's worlds. According to them, fostering interconnections between multiple worlds would ultimately make real peace possible, whereas uniting humans around one single cosmos is a delusion typical of societies characterized as modern, destructive, arrogant and bellicose. 'Here, in any event,' writes Latour, 'is a branching point that our investigator does not want to miss: to be anxious whereas there is actually nothing outside; or, on the contrary, not to realize that, if one is frightened, it is because there really is something that provoked the fright, something pressing!' (Latour 2013: 186). Very anecdotally, remember the title of the incipit with which Bruno Latour begins his *Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, taken from the Gospel of John: 'If you knew God's gift' (*Si scires donum Dei*). The trivialization of this debate is quite scandalous, feeding a semantic hodgepodge, and it is high time that someone it sorted out.

When it comes to ontologies, philosophers are not unambiguous. Markus Gabriel criticizes constructivism, which supposes there is no thing in itself. In constructivism, there is only a thing from X's view. New realism supposes the possibility of knowing things in themselves, with the possibility of errors: there is, of course, a thing from X's view, and there is also a thing in itself (Gabriel 2015: 6). There exist thoughts, as well as facts that these thoughts concern. Up to this point we agree, and there is a broad consensus about this distinction between exteriority and interiority, which includes constructivism. Gabriel subsequently advances the notion of 'fields of sense' as a basic ontological category. Existence would then be an occurrence that causes something to manifest itself in a field of sense (ibid.: 65-6). This is something that immediately brings states, unicorns and God into existence. But Gabriel specifies that something can appear in the field of sense and be false, like witches or unicorns. 'Note: that something appears false (and thereby exists) does not mean that it is true' (ibid.: 66). He acknowledges that it is an erroneous idea that witches exist. The same goes for God when we leave his field of sense. Contrary to this position, we do not wish to accept this equivalence between appearing-for-X and existing. The apparition of something that does not exist is important to grasp: not just the presence effect for X, but also the human states of mind concerned. But it is just as important to point out that, in a situation such as a liturgy, there is not *really* a God.

Does ontology only have to show the multiplicity of fields of sense and their difference? We do not think so, since this gradually generates a kind of obscurantism. This implies describing humans as idiotic and treating readers as idiots. It is a stage of our profession to translate what happens as accurately as possible, but also to employ a more radical sense of the ontology of what reality is.

In our view, it is irrelevant to consider truth a useless notion and to treat objectivity, reality and truth as an evil (Ferraris 2014: 13). As Maurizio Ferraris reminds us, there is an outer world that precedes our conceptual models and perceptual apparatus (ibid.: 39). We believe this reality is worth describing, but without any complacency in the name of some kind of respect for multiple truths. Anthropology would be an empirical, methodological science of humans and of what they are confronted with. It is on this point that one must avoid all complacency. 'If someone fights against the windmills, the best thing is to make him see the truth, namely, that they are windmills and not giants spinning their arms' (ibid.: 68). This type of discourse is a step towards criticism as well as justice. 'The right response,' Ferraris writes, 'to those who manifest a wish to kill in the name of truth would not lie in attacking truth and pointing the finger at its social dangers, but, if anything, in observing that certainties not grounded in facts can have disastrous results' (ibid.).

Postmodernism made reality into simply the medium of our representations. In other words, the being, the ontological side (what is before our eyes) is abandoned in favour of knowledge, the epistemological side (what I know about what is before my eyes). Real knowledge implies stepping outside a specific field, seeing what is going on in that field from the perspective of science and what it teaches about empirical reality. Therefore, reality does not necessarily include what has been invented, constructed or named by humans. In order for God to be real, it is not enough to say that he exists, to think that he existed before being named. In order for him to exist, it is not enough that he has representatives or mediations. The same goes for the state. Thus the anthropologist raises questions about 'reality' and ensures the proper usage—a parsimonious usage—of the notion of existence.

Creating an interval

The principle we have just posited is that one should not treat scientific positions and religious beliefs as equal. This is a requirement for hominist thought, but it is not everything. This is where it is worth remembering primitive times and the uncertainty of the first believer, of he who invented the first religions. Lethargic passivity is excluded from hominism, but not the good use of doubt. What we learn from this first believer is that he did not take his new point of view—his new temptation—all the way. He hesitated, left an interval between his religious statement and the assent he gave to it. It would be much too radical, and non-hominist, to forget this practice of the interval.

Then what must anthropologists teach in the face of religious discourse? They must be teachers in the city, incorporating a kind of uncertainty into the interval, creating compromise, making sure that acts and words do not stand in the way of other acts and words, and they must also accept being the first to take a step back in line with this logic of tolerance. And for

this it is important to introduce an education in distance. The important thing is to get rid of inflexibility and discover the art of making principles nuanced so that they are not stifling, so that one does not die for one's ideas. Peter Sloterdijk, for example, presents various ways to de-supreme God without eliminating him: negative theology, such as an intellectual litany of negative characterizations of God; hermeneutics, such as a movement of multiple interpretations; the humour that militant zealots do not accept. These are three ways of creating intervals, moderating the fervour of certainty, not forgetting uncertainty (Sloterdijk 2009). It really is a matter of 'de-supreming', which is tantamount to restoring the 'not', re-injecting an interval, that of the first believer. This is because positing God as the highest and personifying him means raising requirements and running the risk of forgetting uncertainty and overlooking one of the principles of hominism: that there is no god.

So how does one settle something in order to transmit it, and accept something while not absolutizing and not accepting it, while at the same time maintaining the margin of uncertainty through which there is no certainty in the existence of contradictory things? In short, how can one be, remain or become this human of the origins, when he believed, when he was uncertain and did not want to be certain, when he accepted not knowing? What must one do: on the one hand, cultivate knowledge of the origin, since a lack of knowledge is not beneficial; on the other hand, cultivate the right interval of doubt and reserve.

In the history of 'wisdoms', the interval is in fact often a key element. Therefore in full, lucid, knowing being, an interval—the 'not really'—slips in as anthropological data that cannot be eliminated. It is even a hope to be cultivated. The perfectibility of the act performed without reserve, without any rupture, exclusive of whatever happens, completed consciously in accordance with a goal, is the opposite of reserve and restriction in being: cultivating humility and prudence, as we can read in the thoughts of Lao-Tzu: 'Therefore the Sage is devoted to non-action / Moves without teaching, / Creates ten thousand things without instruction / Lives but does not own, / Acts but does not presume, / Accomplishes without taking credit' (Lao-Tzu 1993: 2). Acting without acting, doing without doing, saying without saying, looking without seeing, listening without hearing, Lao-Tzu writes: 'Act without acting / Serve without serving / taste without tasting / Big, little / Many, few' (ibid.: 63). This is a true education in the human interval and its implied 'not really'. Avoiding excess, not seeking to outdo or confront, not calculating, learning to yield, absorb, abstain, defuse: 'The softest thing in the world / Rides roughshod over the strongest / No-thing enter no-space / This teaches me the benefit of no-action' (ibid.: 43).

It is essential to learn that religion is only human, that God and all other supernatural entities do not exist, while allowing this interval that consists in believing in it, but immediately linking it to a restriction, a reservation, a doubt. For anyone who wishes, the divinity would keep its place in the small interval of uncertainty between its implausible existence and its unproven non-existence, in the incomprehensibility that it is and that it is not. It is a matter of every person being a hominist in actuality, not just lucid, singularist, loving, not just a noter and an expert in arbitrariness, but also a master of the interval! This must be cultivated, not in order to create a remarkable state of clear-sightedness, but rather to maintain, at least as a backdrop, the anthropological idea of human beings as a species

belonging to the genus *Homo* alongside other species that disappeared long ago. *Homo sapiens* have existed for 100,000 years, maybe more, maybe less. They are inventors of the cognitive act of giving assent to religious statements: one must know it! And also doubt. This obviously causes ideological controversies in the name of opposing, arbitrary truths to become hollow.

Then what does anthropology teach? That belief is a natural, cerebral, cognitive 'phenomenon'. But it also teaches that, in human beings, belief generates an equally cognitive way of being that is new relative to other species. A crucial element of this way of living resides in the ability to 'not really', which is sometimes extolled in systems of philosophical or religious thought. The impact of the latter is not negligible, since it creates, in the contents of the former proposition, a restrictive interval.

For example, this would mean keeping a divinity, while introducing something more that prevents one from settling on the idea, that opposes a firm militancy. If there must be perfection of the human species, let us rather imagine natural selection in favour of that ability to absolutize without absolutizing, to reintroduce reserve and doubt in action as much as possible. Relaxation and withdrawal should not cause one to forget the uncertainty, indeed the implausibility of a statement. Withdrawal that reaches the point of avoidance must learn to free itself from the absolute without lapsing into a disengaging carelessness and indifference. Cognitive withdrawal that risks generating various forms of hypolucidity also implies considering the proper adjustment of intensity: imposing without imposing and accepting without accepting, accepting without discussing, but still, not accepting at the same time as. Each situation must find its interval, at least without blocking the intervals of others. It is important to consider the fact that an act of violence is committed when, through his action, a human being leaves another human being no interval of thought or movement. Thus a soldier can accept killing, and a believer can accept being blinded. This implies activating the human potential for lucidity. Anthropological knowledge is therefore quite essential, sometimes only as a backdrop.

Hominist ethics does not see the solution coming from human beings' ability to accept their freedoms, responsibilities and commitments, but rather from their capacity for lucidity and for using their abilities to 'not really'. This does not lead to experiencing existence as a politically engaged, rebellious consciousness, but as someone who measures out a certain form of negation in action and presence. It is therefore not a question of advocating blindness and even delusion. On the contrary, what hominism favours is not a blinded, deluded human being, nor one who searches for truths and reasons to exist, but rather a being who is able—under all circumstances—to know, and also to introduce and enable the interval of reserve. All acts that follow one another against a backdrop of some sort of political or religious ideal, whatever it may be, without any wavering, are problematic, especially if they lead to violence and disregard the singular force that each individual represents. In each and every situation, it is important that every individual can give concrete form to the principle of the interval and its liberating powers. Thus, even if a singular opinion is contrastive by nature, it is important to allow for the possibility of a certain shading within human knowledge itself. By this, we mean that a retreat in the face of a difference of opinion is a regulatory principle for a

hominist position that only makes sense if it promotes tolerance. The interval therefore also means letting everyone be free. It means admitting the profoundly fallible nature of human beings.

Utopia: everyday ethics

Anthropology and utopia are at the intersection of a period of expectation and a real, potentially reactive space. Maïté Maskens and Ruy Blanes (Maskens and Blanes 2013) pointed out that utopia is inherent in the very idea of an anthropological praxis in its ethical and political configurations. It gives meaning to our perspectives and guides their orientation. Every anthropologist draws on it.

Singularity, truth and human nature are the pivots around which our anthropological utopia revolves. However, the academic conditions of such a proposition do not leave it much room. Debating these questions does not seem to be the order of the day. It is good to remember the ideal of the Enlightenment and the legacy that the human and social sciences owe it, today more than ever. How does one avoid a state of supervision, a gilded cage with assigned compartments for each sociocultural category? Tearing ourselves away from dominant anthropological ideas would make it possible to attain a critical ideal.

Kant proposed a shared world founded upon common principles, universal rights that went beyond the coalitions of his time. The premises of the anthropological vision that we support is similar to the philosopher's desire to attract everyone to an independent, empirical academic discipline. This would make it possible to respond to the problems of human existence while at the same time releasing it from the reserve of codes and political rights in order to insert it into a universal right of humanity (Kant 2006). Keith Hart writes that 'histories of anthropology have rarely mentioned this work, perhaps because the discipline has evolved so far away from Kant's original premises' (Hart 2010: 442), though at the same time Hart maintains that it is 'indispensable to the formation of world society in the coming century' (ibid.: 446). Thus anthropology would be an essential vehicle for decentering and broadening our localist visions. It would be the only discipline that has a legitimate, asserted place alongside human beings on the stage of the universal.

This universality conveys a desire to profoundly change human nature or, at least, reorient it through the prescription of a certain kind of ethics. These ethics would connect an individual's singular power to act freely with human behaviour guided by the hominist principles we have set out. The initiating conjugation of our hominist vision would be that of the 'can' and 'should', both cautiously distancing themselves according to an appropriate interval and a principle of tolerance. It is no longer simply a matter of supporting sociocultural particularities and being 'prepared to view without surprise, repugnance or revolt whatever may strike us as strange in the many new forms of social expression' (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 49). Despite his support for a dynamic, uncontemplative movement, Lévi-Strauss did not succeed in inspiring a new way of living together. The proposed tolerance principle, by not resting on unity but on relativity, and by emphasizing differences instead of

similarities, marked an epoch in theory. In a practical sense, this proposition was unable to connect the contemplative, evolving 'can' with the empirical, prescriptive 'should'. As anthropologists, we do not forget this connection, a bias that is necessary with regard to a realistic, mono-naturalist position, accepting the fact that truth is a good against obscurantism, delusion and manipulation.

This connection corresponds to an empirical process that too few intellectuals support when it is a question of ethics, from the 'can' towards the 'should'. It is accepted today that ethics does not reside explicitly in one province of our mental activity. Ethics is what profoundly characterizes our human nature. Consequently it slips into, and sometimes conceals itself, in our most ordinary actions, in the most trivial events. Therefore our ideals, our absolute values, must not be separated from our ordinary actions. The first movement we support consists, on the one hand, in observing and describing attitudes adopted in the face of reality, that is to say, truth—the 'can'. What are its external conditions and internal frames of mind? It is not a matter of passing a critical judgment on the representations and actions we face, but rather of recognizing the influence of beliefs, their inner workings and everyday manifestations. Veena Das maintains that ethics is not a separate field, and regrets that this question should be treated as an object towering over our existences, as a strategy for overcoming the problem of subjective predispositions. As she writes in the tradition of Wittgenstein, on this level ethics is simply made up of judgments that emerge 'in the small disciplines that ordinary people perform in their everyday life' because life should be considered 'the natural expression of ethics' (2012: 133-49). In anthropology, it is no longer a matter of solely taking an interest in unsettling events that radically contradict or challenge our ethics, but rather reincorporating dramas right into the triviality of our ordinary lives. Through description and observation, every anthropologist should initially be able to detach himself from transcendent values in order to go back to those sensibilities that drive individuals to act, such as fear, love, anxiety or hate.

The process into which we would like to launch anthropology consists, on the other hand, in bringing the truth to the ears of those who are unaware of it, ignore it or scorn it. This second ethical movement, the 'should', does not let everyone's responsibility disperse through sociocultural worlds out of the simple principles of tolerance and benign neglect. It is therefore a matter of conceiving ethics as a self-education. Teaching the truth: this is the prescriptive path that would give anthropologists a role that is very different from the one they shoulder today. How can some of the current mind-sets of human beings be changed? How can they be inspired with a reflexive movement that would be beneficial and, above all, that would make it possible to live together more virtuously, in a world where hatred of others would no longer be tolerated? Reality would then be accessible to all, and everyone would accept being responsible for their own actions, without answering to a non-existent entity. If I cold-bloodedly kill a woman sitting on a cafe terrace, I am not submitting to the commandment of a god, since this god does not exist. So why would I do such a thing? If I mobilize my soldiers in a war-torn country that is not my own, I am not submitting to the patriotic values of my country because it does not exist. So why would I do such a thing? Every anthropological investigation practice would therefore also be established on the basis

of an educational relationship. What everyone needs is a reversal of our usual way of conceiving the world, before becoming 'people of Earth' and good 'ecologists'.[4] In our view, thinking and rethinking about becoming 'human', and about what this means, has never been a higher priority.

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[4] We are alluding here to Bruno Latour's most recent book (2015).

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