

# Toward A Posthuman Humanism: Serresian Federative Humanism between Natural Contract and Political Ecology

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## Abstract

Intended as a step of a general attempt to grasp further philosophical meanings/implications of the posthuman galaxy, which without much doubt still deserves many insights, this article argues the case for a posthuman humanism. Moving from the consideration that emerging ideas within the posthuman debate as crucial—i.e. openness and non-exhaustiveness, interrogation on borders recalling the urgency of the rethinking overall of the human even before the setting of prefixes denoting overshoots—can be traced/identified in Michel Serres's philosophy/anthropology of hominescence, the article heuristically engages a philosophical comparison/dialogue with what Serres calls objective dimension of hominescence, that's to say new human's links to the world that precisely point to a new humanism, federative of nature and culture. Through analyzing Serresian theming of this anthropological shift and its cogency of the signing of a symbiotic human-natural contract in the context of a so-called political ecology, the article reads them as a germinal nucleus of a posthuman humanism. So that by leveraging on such theoretical foundations it makes the case of a federative, hybrid, anthropo-decentrist, decentralized, finally authentic humanism, which can represent the post- of any anthropocentric, exclusivist, essentialist humanism; in other words, a posthuman humanism.

**Keywords:** Federative Humanism; Michel Serres; Natural Contract; Political Ecology; Posthuman Humanism

## Introduction

As a galaxy, the posthuman seems to develop and articulate not so much on foundations but rather on questions and problems that more or less voluntarily end up knotting and intertwining, crossed by the red thread of the interrogation on borders, recalling the urgency of the rethinking overall of the human (even before the setting of prefixes denoting overshoots) [1-9].

Identifying/tracing these same aspects of openness and non-exhaustiveness expressed in Serresian

philosophical "formula" of *hominescence*,<sup>1</sup> I find it useful to examine posthuman—whose (philosophical) meanings/implications still deserve many insights—, and specifically, within it, (the possibility of) a posthuman humanism, in the light of an idea of humanism as a *foedus* (contract) between man and nature, as conceived by

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<sup>1</sup> *Hominescence* is an inchoative neologism thanks to which Serres expresses the fact that, for the first time in his history, no longer man inherits his condition, but begins to produce it himself entertaining new relationships with his body (subjective dimension of *hominescence*), the world (objective dimension), and other men (collective dimension).

Michel Serres in the context of his philosophy/anthropology of *hominescence*.

To this purpose, I heuristically engage a philosophical comparison/dialogue with what Serres calls objective dimension of *hominescence*, that is to say new human links to the world that precisely point to a new humanism, federative of nature and culture. Serresian proposal for a symbiotic human-natural contract, whose habitat could be the Natural Parc [10], a space ideal for a political ecology in which human and environmental interrelations meet, is in fact what I take into consideration as germinal nucleus of a posthuman humanism [11].

### True Humanism between Natural Contract and Political Ecology: The Voice of Michel Serres

I'm convinced, as said, that some conceptual nodes of the recent reflection of Serres cross and embrace significantly with those that within the posthuman debate seem to emerge as crucial ideas, hopefully favouring of posthuman itself a better focus. These conceptual nodes/junctions are: above mentioned *hominescence* as the expression/theming of an epochal anthropological voluntary shift that has the world as a global reference; connected recognition of human and scientific creative responsibilities, in relationship with a "new" idea of man's exceptionality; above mentioned discovery of the need to establish a symbiotic relationship between human history, duration of evolution, and the time of universe, which founds a natural contract; the identification in Life and Earth Sciences (*Sciences de la Vie et de la Terre - Sci.Vi.Te.*) of a new science of man's ontological permeability towards other living beings and nature; the idea of the Water, Air, Fire, Earth, Livings (W.A.F.E.L.), that is, of a world institution, of a parliament in which the living and the earth (Biogea)<sup>2</sup> are finally represented.

In this perspective, the symbiosis between human history, duration of evolution, and the time of the universe establishes, as said, the natural contract—to which Serres dedicates the work(s) of the same title[12,13]—: human exceptionality, identified in man's consciousness of his own exceptional nature as the creator of evolution, in the sense of the discoverer of the "secrets of all births", with the contextual rediscovery of the evidence of the impossibility of separation in oneself and outside of natural and cultural, is, in the Serresian reflection, the germinal nucleus of a humanism finally oriented at federating, to a *foedus* (contract), to the

signing of a human-natural contract that recognizes to nature the condition of subject of right, i.e. of subject on which to base a natural right.

The rethinking of the relationship between man and nature, pointed out by the Serresian "humanistic" perspective as an implication of human exceptionality, opens, therefore, in the view of Serres, to the natural contract, as a *post-* of the social contract of modernity, considered expression of anthropocentric exclusivist cultural and scientific models that have led to a forgetfulness of the original relationship with nature.

It's worth observing, at this point, that his theming, within *hominescence*, of role inversion in man/nature relationship is presented by Serres from an interesting and intriguing point of view, which is the mountain's one. If up to the 1940s/50s mountain itself through heavy challenges to those who lived there, to a fragile humanity that was facing a harsh environment—a weak man was challenged by a strong nature, in the opposition to whose victories the scientific efforts were concentrated—, nowadays mountain itself has become soft faced to hard victory of the "new" man. This means that it is the mountain now that needs man—and in the awareness of this lies, precisely, for Serres, human exceptionalness—.

So that the Natural Park constitutes a reduced model of the new relationships between man and the "new" world; it represents, for Serres, the point of arrival and/or escape of the process of hominization, for which any form of separation ends. In Park's niche the human interrelations in politics—in the sense of associated human life—are connected with the ecological interrelations in the environment. Therefore, the Park becomes the habitat of this so-called political ecology—in the sense of an association between human interrelations in associated human life and ecological interrelations in the environment—; an open ecological-political space, a realization of reciprocal interaction, i.e. of a "mixture" in which the old subject-object asymmetry is dissolved in favour of an interweaving of relationships, on the path of the signing of a natural contract. Serres, however, notes that, as this "mixture" is still almost ignored by the institutions, it is necessary to consider the Natural Park as a possible reduced model of the future human relationship with the entire planet, that is, a model of future politics.

It is therefore the assumption of the *hominescence* point of view to unveil, for Serres, the so-called modern humanism and its implications—merely social contract, anthropocentric idea of human expansion in the whole

<sup>2</sup> "Biogea" is the term by which Serres means earth/living union.

range of beings and in the context of the living collectives etc.—as the driving forces of a movement of de-realization and ontological impoverishment of the natural world that can pose a serious threat to the humanity.

So, it's the exceptionality of man's awareness of his own exceptionality of *naturans* (nature's creator), hominescent *post-* of this modern humanistic exclusivism and a-cosmism, which points to a substitution of the logic of parasite with that of the symbiote, towards a contract of fairness and reciprocity, in the involvement of man and the world within a history human and natural together.

If indeed such an exceptionality, so to speak, implies the maturation of the idea of the responsibility of the dominion upon this same capacity of domination in front of a planet perceived bruised by human conflicts and exploitation, and at risk of destruction (with potential effects on humanity), the signing of the natural contract manifests itself an ethical and juridical cogency in this perspective of *hominescence*, on the way to the federative humanism. So as this, on the other hand, becomes factual evidence in the context of/through Sci.Vi.Te., the new "center" of knowledge, the only knowledge able to speak the language of the Biogea.

Acquisition of the awareness of his own exceptionality as creator of evolution invested with federative responsibilities therefore takes place in man thanks to this and in this interference and integration of sciences, which reveal the world as a global reference to the ongoing changes in man, and as an interlocutor no longer excluded from the aims of human political relations, in the cone of a global emergency of the necessity of a synthesis between nature's laws and those of *polis* (politics).

Federative humanism is therefore declined by Serres in the idea of the creation of a world institution, the W.A.F.E.L., the parliament of the Biogea that represents the figure of a pact aimed at putting an end to the human practices of exploitation of the world, on the path of establishment of a common good, according to the federative ideal of a symbiosis in Biogea between man, inanimate things, and living beings; which is then the only chance of common survival.

In this context, Sci.Vi.Te., being the only sciences able to speak the language of the Biogea, emerge as the new frontier of science, in which politics, humanities, and social sciences can be solved. But they also emerge as sciences that can favour human self-awareness of being a living whose life, bound to the earth, remains determined by the laws of the earth itself and of life; so that Serres

considers them as a possible turning point in the essential relationship of man himself with the world, on the path to federative humanism itself.

And Sciviti scientists are referred to as recipients of the task of taking floor in W.A.F.E.L. in the name of the Biogea, in order to affirm the common good of the world and of the man. In fact, if the exceptional nature of man emerges precisely as a perception of his own exceptional nature of being capable of evolutionary intervention by virtue of technique (science), scientists are those who, through scientific research and its long-term perspectives capable of providing awareness of the contemporary and fostering forecasts, can inaugurate federative humanism.

So that the rediscovery by man of the impossibility of separating nature and culture is accompanied by the perception of the need to promote a general reform of human intellect, on the path of a passage from the will to power—which inevitably leads to the destruction of the human species and of the natural habitat—to the *foedus* (contract).

It's worth observing at this respect that Natural contract (and its denunciation of Cartesian order as an act of appropriation that made man possessor of nature) is supplemented by Serres, in his recent *Malfesance* [14], with a lease contract, bearer of an eco-social peace, in the perspective of human dis-appropriation of the world, on the basis of which, only when men become mere tenants, they can see peace among themselves as peace with the world.

The reopening of the dialogue with nature (as Biogea) and therefore the recognition of man's belonging to the terrestrial context as well as of his role as tenant, become in the Serresian reflection practical needs related to the possibility of human life on the earth, but, at the same time, cultural, ethical and epistemological instances, that require, at the intersection between humanistic disciplines and natural sciences, a new reflection on man-in-Biogea, that is on earth with all its elements and all its living species.

And it's right this the direction in which the hominescent emergence should be conceived and managed: recognize, also at the level of institutions, the bio-diverse inhabitants of the earth in their ontological, ethical and cognitive scope. Only in this way Serres succeeds in figuring federative humanism and hypothesizing for the human, *naturans* (nature's creator) and creative of evolution, a re-declaration of the relationship with nature in Biogea (*between* life and

earth), in the context of sharing, of an access, an active intervention, that can both avoid vindictive reactions of nature (as an object of human domination and exploitation), and propose an eco-social peace.

The exceptionality of man as the awareness of his own exceptional nature as *causa sui* (cause of himself), at this point, comes to imply, in Serres's thought, a *con-naître* (to be born together) as a process of discovery and liberation of things, and therefore as *re-naître* (to be born again) of man with them, in the particular perspective of giving/leaving a voice to that which does not possess it-or perhaps that possesses one that until now has remained unheard or has not been deciphered in its otherness; that is, it implies a "thinking like"—going out of oneself and getting into the other—which is obviously an ontological, ethical and cognitive decentralization.

And it is precisely, as mentioned, in this process that Serres identifies the turning point toward that authentic humanism in which the human being is no longer the exclusive emanation of man, but the result of paths of conjugation with non-human otherness, in an anti-reductionist and federative perspective, as a hominescent declination of and/or hominescent response to the question of human exceptionality.

So that Serresian philosophy of *hominescence* is configured as the expression/theming of something as a fact, that is this same anthropological rupture and this change of the human condition—produced by man—, which are to claim a change in man's consideration.

So, as actual change of the human condition (human being as cause of himself, anthropological variation produced by man), change of the perception of human condition, awareness of the change, understanding and management of change with its revolutionary potential, the philosophy of *hominescence* takes precisely its form and is articulated without disdaining to establish a relationship between itself and so called modern humanism, whose reductionism it comes, in this way, to find out.

The assumption of the *hominescence* perspective thus favors, for Serres, as said, a critical reinterpretation of modern humanism that returns it based upon an exclusivist vision of man, that is, the vision of a human that ends up collapsing upon man; so much so that the same philosophy of *hominescence*, which for its constitution as an inchoative theming of change is oriented towards a *post-* horizon, thinks and proposes itself, at the same time, as a tread of humanism itself,

worthy of this name because finally federative of nature and culture.

If, therefore, so called modern humanism emerges from the hominescent suggestion as a misunderstanding of the meaning of man, conceived in an essential and disjunctive way, and purged of the non-human, only a federative perspective, that considers man as open to the living in topological continuity with biosphere and temporal with evolution, seems likely be able to overcome this implosive and excessively anthropocentric drift, favoring precisely the advent of authentic humanism [15].

### Conclusion: Toward a Posthuman Humanism

The hominescent perspective, in considering weak, reductionist, and too anthropocentric so-called classical humanism, sets itself on the path of a posthuman humanism—which is such because of its federative, anthropo-de-centrist and therefore, so to speak, universal character—without however resisting/giving up idea of human exceptionality.

Rather, this perspective rethinks, re-identifies, redesigns this exceptionality in the direction of the current man's awareness—favoured by techno-sciences, but above all by the intersection between hard sciences and soft sciences—of his own exceptionality as a self-evolving capacity, which at the same time implies the assumption of responsibility for the domain of domain capacity.

Only today, therefore, can one begin to speak of authentic humanism, as for the first time decentralized thanks to the overcoming of any particularistic centrism; and only now, aware that "everything" depends on "us", we begin to know this "everything" and this "us"; human exceptionality is in short to be identified, I repeat, in the man's awareness of his own exceptional nature as a *causa sui* (cause of himself) with the responsibilities connected to this condition, on the way to the construction of the contents of a humanism federative of nature and culture.

It is thus, therefore, that the humanistic perspective of Serres is revealed, as it were, a suggestion of a new idea of human exceptionality that leads to a rethinking of the definitions of humanity and relations with other living beings and the environment.

The incisive voice of Serres, which, as said, indicates human exceptionality as man's possibility to acquire awareness of his own uniqueness of *naturans* (nature's

creator), and his connected federative responsibilities, thus suggests, so to speak, to read in the posthuman galaxy reformulations of concept of human exceptionality, and leads us to consider the *post-* component referred to what has so far been called humanism, and not instead to humanism *tout-court*.

A humanism, at this point, considered finally authentic because able to go on developing around this new concept of human exceptionality; *at whose beginning* Serres's reflection suggests to think that the posthuman galaxy is placed, in that most probably it is not disdaining of this exceptionality, but rather elaborative of its reformulation, on the way of rethinking man, his relations with other living beings, and technological artifacts. Decentralization, border dissolution, hybridization: natural contract in natural park [16-27].

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