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## Human adventure

Nathanaël Wallenhorst<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** The concept of human nature refers to the essence of our species, and to contingency on the present. Meanwhile, the emerging idea of the ‘human adventure’ emphasises the uncertainty of the future, and the possibility of altering the characteristics on which we are contingent. (Notably, we could modify the earth’s system, or even alter humans’ own biological make-up). This article is an extension to ‘The Human Condition in the Anthropocene’, based on Hannah Arendt’s anthropological model developed in *The human condition* (1958). That model defines *animal laborans* as driven by work, *Homo faber* as driven by creativity, and *zôon politikon* as driven by action. Here, from the standpoint of humans in the Anthropocene, we explore these three categories that make up Arendt’s idea of the human condition. We propose to build upon the model by speaking of the *human adventure*.

Firstly, over the past few decades, there have been a wealth of publications on the dominance of *Homo oeconomicus*. The category has become widely accepted, and built on by multiple authors. *Homo oeconomicus* is an extension to Arendt’s *animal laborans*, except more emphasis is placed on consumption than on work. Arendt perspicaciously noted that any work produced is automatically destined for consumption, and therefore, such product had no longer-term existence. In the sixty years since the publication of *The human condition*, consumerism has gone from strength to strength, and today, *Homo oeconomicus* (the consumer) is certainly dominant over *animal laborans*.

Secondly, Arendt’s *Homo faber* is also ripe for re-examination. One of the strengths of Arendt’s model is that it acknowledges the overlap between the private and public spheres, in *Homo faber*’s creations. *Homo faber*, whose products are not destined for consumption, helps build a world shared by all humanity. Today’s world is marked by considerable socioeconomic acceleration since the 1950s, as attested by Steffen *et al.*’s ‘Great Acceleration’ curves (2004; 2015) and Hartmut Rosa’s analyses (2010, 2012). In that context, the work that humans produce largely contributes to the global spread of consumerism. The same is true of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science (NBIC), exploited by web-based businesses; progress in aerospace engineering; humankind’s desire to colonise Mars – these efforts are driven not by an association of nations, but by relatively young multi-billion-dollar industries; or even art designed for consumption (Menger, 2003). Against this backdrop, can it really still be claimed that *Homo faber* helps build a shared world through creations not directly designed for immediate consumption?

Thirdly, Arendt’s action-based *zôon politikon* is worth refining. From Chapter 5 of *The Human Condition*, it becomes clear that we must distinguish between two components that facilitate action: the primacy of collective interests over individual ones, and the shared existence of

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humankind. In Arendt's view, the world and life refer to two separate fundamental components of the human condition. Life is the intervening time between birth and death – between entering the world and leaving it. Life refers to the economic sphere, and the necessity of consumption-driven perpetual motion. The world, for its part, is political; it exists before and persists after life. The concept refers to a type of permanence, and always to extremely long periods of time.

Fourthly, the opposing categories of 'life' and 'world' ought to be re-examined, in the context of the Anthropocene. The revised anthropological approach employed throughout this compendium consolidates the idea of 'the world' (that political space in which cooperation emerges). However, the 'world' is not in opposition to 'life', because the shared fabric of the living world makes up the body politic (and the world). The political world exists only because of interactions (both organic and chemical) between living beings. The political world is merely the consequence of exchanges between living beings – and also interactions with non-living, non-organic things. The work of contemporary German philosopher and biologist, Andreas Weber, is of particular interest when considering the biological and living materiality of the (political) world. Weber continually demonstrates the profound link between the paradigms of the world and of life. The world is characterised by its aliveness (2016, 2017; Weber & Kurt, 2015) (this idea is reminiscent of Corine Pelluchon's approach in *Les nourritures*, 2015). Thus, reality is not merely objective, but creative and expressive above all (and therefore unpredictable and uncontrollable), because it is living. Even above all in the Anthropocene, movement is possible, and so, therefore, is hope, because the primary characteristic of our reality is its aliveness. Aliveness, in the Weberian sense, includes Arendt's political component, based on the relationships within plurality, and the novelty allowed by natality. Such aliveness is central element in Weber's thinking and his way of looking at the world, and is characterised by its expansiveness. However, this expansiveness is not that of insatiable capitalism, characterised by the constant need for 'more'. For example, the paradigm of life is not viewed in reference to consumption (unlike in Arendt's model). The expansiveness is that of life, rather than that of an individual. Thus, rather than individuals having the opportunity to develop and expand, *life* can develop and expand by being shared. Here, coexistence precedes existence: 'I am because you are' (Weber, 2017, p. 10). In Weber's view, when we share, rather than impoverishing us or taking something away from us, it actually enriches us.

Arendt's distinction between life and world is no longer of interest in our time, marked by the Anthropocene. Indeed, in today's world, we need to strengthen our roots in the living universe we all share, and break away from the destructive hegemony of capitalism. We need to think of politics in contrast to economic hegemony, which is rooted in the aliveness of the living universe. Thus, the category is limited to express that economic hegemony. We need to come up with another category, indicating that destructive domination of economic-based logics – destructive because it is unlimited. Here, we propose to identify it as part of *hubris*. The choice of this term to represent this component, that stands in opposition to the political, is quite deliberate: destruction is a fundamental anthropological component which must be reined in, otherwise the very survival of the human adventure is threatened. Also, *hubris*, which is a fundamental part of our nature, cannot be easily overcome.

The table below offers an overview of the three dimensions of the human adventure. These categories are interlinked. Chemical interactions facilitate the political world; in turn, the political may encourage coexistence, amongst humans and between humans and non-humans. This helps 'living' relationships to operate more fluidly (allowing everyone to live without the threat of one species dominating others). These categories are to be considered in the context of peaceful coexistence.

Sphere	Private sphere	Public sphere
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	<b>Economical</b>	<b>Political</b>	
<b>Aspects of the human adventure</b>	<i>Hubris</i>	<b>World</b>	<b>Coexistence</b>
<b>Driving logic</b>	Profit	Responsibility	Hospitality
<b>Central hub/pole</b>	Individual	Collective	Others
<b>Anthropological model</b>	<i>Homo oeconomicus</i>	<i>Homo collectivus</i>	<i>Homo religatus</i>
<b>Biosphere</b>	Anthromes	Agora	Milieu

*The three dimensions of the human adventure*

Once *hubris* is accepted as one of the three components of the human adventure, the category of life again has its place in the biosphere, giving these three dimensions materiality and power. Life, as a biosphere, refers to the whole of the planet's surface, looking onto the cosmos and receiving sunlight. There are three aspects to the biosphere which imbues the human adventure with materiality.

Firstly, *anthromes* (anthropogenic biomes) are areas of the earth's surface that have been appropriated and profoundly altered by humans to suit their own purposes (leading to the destruction of animal habitats). Today, a huge proportion of the biosphere has been anthropised, which risks causing major systemic disruption.

Secondly, the *agora* is an arena for coming together and exchanging words, giving rise to subsequent action. The biosphere can be viewed as an agora, in that it is the place where all political subjects, or entities, that inhabit the earth (humans, animals, plants, minerals, etc.) encounter one another, and have various types of exchanges. If we speak of the biosphere as an agora, then we must also discuss the interactions of which life is made up. This is the responsibility of humans.

The third dimension of the biosphere is the so-called *milieu*. The emphasis, in the notion of milieu, is on how spaces bear the indelible hallmarks of the representations and relationships that take place there (Berque, 2016).

We hold that the human adventure (the etymological roots of which are outlined in the article 'The Human Condition in the Anthropocene') is the intersection between three contradictory axes of human behaviour. One such axis is individualism, characterised *Homo oeconomicus*'s neoliberal drive to maximise individual interests. However, there are two other axes which do not fit with individualism: firstly, collectivism, marked by *Homo collectivus*'s logic of responsibility for the group; and secondly, altruism, marked by *Homo religatus*'s hospitality and drive for coexistence with others.

*Homo oeconomicus* is an integral part of the human adventure. In today's world, the hegemony of *Homo oeconomicus* is a problem. Fundamentally, the model we propose here opposes *Homo oeconomicus* with the idea of *post-Promethean political togetherness*. That idea determines the structure of the three-dimensional discussion in this compendium. The counterweight to *Homo oeconomicus*' individualism, rather than an individual driven by other philosophies, is simply a void: a relational space with nobody at its centre. Two anthropological figures are needed in order for the aforementioned post-Promethean political togetherness to emerge: the group-oriented *Homo collectivus* and the *Homo religatus*, capable of hospitality towards others. The post-Promethean political togetherness is on a par with Arendt's concept of action: it can only

come to pass through humans acting together. These contradictory logics driving *Homo oeconomicus*, *Homo collectivus* and *Homo religatus* represent conflict between mercantile goods (*Homo oeconomicus*), collective goods (*Homo collectivus*) and the common good (*Homo religatus*), as discussed by Flahault (2013). These three anthropological characteristics are discussed in depth in ‘*Homo oeconomicus, Homo collectivus, Homo religatus*’. One of the major issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – which the dawn of the Anthropocene brings into sharp focus – is the urgent need to break away from capitalism and mercantile economics. In order to do so, we need a new concept of what human beings are.

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