Introduction

Human being(s) in international relations

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"If they say, Why, why, tell 'em that it's human nature"[1]
"The word human is no human."[2]

Homo absconditus: in search of the human in world politics

When John Ruggie formulated his famous question, "What makes the world of international relations hang together?"[3] he responded to a development in International Relations (IR)[4] theory that had started in the 1980s. It saw an unprecedentedly pluralistic string of disputes over the foundations of the discipline which, until then, had been mostly taken for granted. Scholars increasingly challenged persistent core assumptions, for example about the meaning of sovereignty, the teleology of anarchy, or the role of the state.[5] However, up until today, there is one core concept that, while frequently addressed in various guises, has never been explicitly and systematically engaged with at the level of disciplinary debates: the human.[6]

[1] Lyrics to the song "Human Nature" performed by Michael Jackson, written by Steve Porcaro and John Bettis.
[2] Niklas Luhmann, "Wie ist Bewußtsein an Kommunikation beteiligt?" in Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung 6: Die Soziologie und der Mensch*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2005), pp. 38–54.
[3] Paraphrasing John Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together?" *International Organization* 52/4 (1998), 855–85.
[4] In the following, "IR" stands for International Relations as an academic discipline, while lowercase "international relations" indicates the empirical domain of study. "IR/ir" is used when reference is made to both domains simultaneously.
[5] For example, Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46/2 (1992), 391–425; Richard Ashley, "Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique," *Millennium* 17/2 (1987), 227–62.
[6] Here "the human" is understood as a placeholder for humanity and its (social) scientific conceptualization.

Such neglect of the human in IR theory is odd. After all, it seems that since its inception there has been an unspoken consensus in IR that Ruggie's question might as well read "How do humans make the world of international relations hang together?" That we live in a world made up of and by people seems difficult to refute indeed. Likewise, it is indisputable that world politics could not proceed without humanity. What is more, when we study our disciplinary history, we can quite clearly see how ancestors to classical and contemporary IR theories have passed on notions of the human to their intellectual heirs. Therefore, most IR scholars will readily agree that, beneath whatever else may make IR/ir hang together, there is an undeniable link between humanity and world politics. While some hold that world politics is an entirely human enterprise, others concede that a human element is at least always implied and does "have a hand" in shaping international politics.[7]

However, even in the face of such evidence for humanity's significance to IR/ir, crucial questions remain unanswered. Connected to a range of other issues for disciplinary debate is the concern over what impact the diverse conceptualizations of the human, on which our observations build, have on the study of world politics and, more specifically, what they allow us to say about the politics of humanity, or "human" politics. It is such concerns that motivate the overarching question of the present volume: "*How, why* and *with which consequences* do IR theories (not) deal with the human in the study of world politics?"

The significance of this question becomes clearer once we further unpack the concern with how and what IR can tell us about humanity in relation to world politics, and vice versa. The question indicates and emphasizes the role of theory. Indeed, our views on humanity and world politics are organized by theory.[8] On a very basic level, our theories are our interpretative matrixes that let us see the world in specific ways. It is through them that we (sub)consciously develop and, moreover, discipline our view(s) on world politics, the human, and the politics of humanity. Hence, the insight that preconceived notions of the human, be they implicit or explicit, will function as axiomatic building blocks in theorizing and critically predetermine theoretical perspectives and, by extension, political dispositions should already compel the discipline's attention.

[7] The "human *element*" neither implies a reference to the natural sciences nor a form of embodiment or essentialism. Rather, it signals that "something about" humanity always finds its way into IR theories.

[8] For a still insightful introduction on the role of theory as an organizing principle in science *and* everyday life, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 47–128.

Yet, pushing the issue even further, IR must also ask itself whether it actually does humanity a favor by reverting to (concepts of) the human in theorizing world politics – even if it is to be *humane*. This volume, therefore, enquires into our practices of theorizing to examine the human in IR and how it functions in diverse ways as a key part of our disciplinary discourse on world politics.

The human remains a mystery in the scattered disciplinary literatures that theorize it. We have previously opened up the topic in a forum in *International Studies Review*.[9] The present volume is the first attempt to engage with the wide variety of concepts of the human and their role in IR theory in a *general* and *systematic* manner. Previously, there have been quite a few works on various aspects of "man in politics," usually under the label of human nature. Many of these publications take a broader philosophical view and make no strong connections to IR theory.[10] Closest to the present enterprise is Pami Aalto's aspiring essay that points out interdisciplinary connections for considering "the human subject in International Studies."[11] However, already implicit in his particular terminology of the "human (as) subject" is that he observes IR/ir from within a human-centered framework, following what we will call the *anthropological*, as opposed to the *post-anthropological* option of linking humanity and IR/ir.[12] His attempt to "humanize IR" thus takes only one of two basic epistemological possibilities into account. His challenge to existing disciplinary boundaries is posed to buttress existing concepts of the human.

From an opposite perspective, a New Materialism is emerging in IR theory pushing for a *Posthuman International Relations*.[13] In a recent edition of *Millennium*, which summarizes the results of the 2012 *Millennium* conference, this trend is defined by William E. Connolly as

[9] Daniel Jacobi and Annette Freyberg-Inan (eds.), "Forum: Hidden Essentialisms: How Human Nature Assumptions Surreptitiously Shape IR Theory," *International Studies Review* 14/4 (2012), pp. 645–65.

[10] To be sure, they may present very elaborate conceptualizations of the human. Yet, they mostly fail to point out their merit for and effect on the actual study of world politics.

[11] Pami Aalto, "The Human Subject in International Studies: An Outline for Interdisciplinary Programmes," in Vilho Harle and Sami Moisio (eds.), *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 178–203. The essay is recommended reading, as in his literature review Aalto pays particular attention to those (new) IR literatures that sit on the margins of a (trans)disciplinary discourse. He thus fills in many of the gaps left in our upcoming history of the human in IR which, here, has to be painted in broad strokes.

[12] The heuristic distinction between anthropological and post-anthropological approaches will be further elaborated at the end of this section.

[13] Following the title of the book by Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations* (London: Zed Books, 2011). On the difficulty of labeling these approaches, see William E. Connolly, "The 'New Materialism' and the Fragility of Things," *Millennium* 41/3 (2013), 402.

a series of movements in several fields that criticise anthropocentrism, rethink subjectivity by playing up the role of inhuman forces within the human, emphasize the self-organizing powers of several nonhuman processes, explore dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practice, rethink the sources of ethics, and commend the need to fold a planetary dimension more actively and regularly into studies of global, interstate and state politics.[14]

However, with regard to a systematic discussion of the human in IR/ir, these perspectives exclusively operate from within a framework that de-centers the human, following what we will call the *post-anthropological*, as opposed to the *anthropological* option of linking humanity and IR/ir. Consequently, these approaches also limit themselves to only one of two basic epistemological possibilities of theorizing the human.

Close to our own work, albeit adopting a broader political science perspective, is a forward-looking volume edited by Ian Forbes and Steve Smith, which has inspired the way in which we have set up our own IR-focused investigation. Especially noteworthy here is the attempt to show how a specific concept of the human "may be used to hide untestable and highly controversial assumptions, which then, by intervention of a concept of human nature, critically affect conclusions and prescriptions."[15] Similarly, in a more general methodological contribution, Donald Moon reveals much about the role of "models of man" in the *Logic of Political Inquiry*.[16] Finally, from a historical perspective and in an attempt to reconcile IR and political theory, David Boucher has studied the role of human nature assumptions in classical *Political Theories of International Relations*.[17]

Other works examine concepts of the human only for specific IR schools of thought, most often realism.[18] The remaining titles typically

[14] Connolly, "The 'New Materialism,'" 399.
[15] Ian Forbes and Steve Smith (eds.), *Politics and Human Nature* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983), p. 4.
[16] Donald Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry: A Synthesis of Opposed Perspectives," in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), vol. I, pp. 131–228.
[17] David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations* (London: Oxford, 1998).
[18] For example, Annette Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man: The Realist Theory of International Relations and Its Judgment of Human Nature* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004); Jim George, "Realist Ethics, International Relations, and Postmodernism: Thinking beyond the Egoism-Anarchy Thematic," *Millennium* 24/2 (1995), 195–223; Michael Loriaux, "The Realists and Saint Augustine: Skepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought," *International Studies Quarterly* 36/4 (1992), 401–20. Other works touch on human nature assumptions as part of a more general assessment of realism. See, e.g., Stefano Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998). Yet other works focus on the human nature arguments of specific theorists or streams in the realist tradition [most commonly on Hobbes, e.g. Cornelia Navari, "Hobbes and the 'Hobbesian Tradition' in International Thought," *Millennium* 11/3 (1982), 203–22].

exhibit a narrow focus on the human, usually in connection with a specific aspect of its species being or issue area such as gender,[19] foreign policy,[20] or war.[21] In between there have been a few articulate but nevertheless scattered calls for a more thorough investigation of our concepts of the human.[22] It is quite telling that the most recent such calls appeared within the framework of a tribute to the work of Kenneth Waltz.[23] Appeals to (re)connect with the human element tend to follow like pendulum swings upon assertions of structuralism. Around the same time, the *Journal of International Relations and Development* devoted a symposium to ideas on human nature, their place in the history of the discipline in general as well as in realism and liberalism in particular, and the role granted to emotions.[24] Since then we can observe a growing interest in the theorization of select aspects of (social) psychology, usually under the heading of emotions and the relevance of quests for respect, recognition, or status.[25] The human seems to be coming increasingly back into IR, but as of yet systematic and broad treatments of the diversity of ways in which this can and does occur are lacking. Here is where the current volume makes its contribution.

[19] For example, Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Francis Fukuyama, "Women and the Evolution of World Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 77/5 (1998), 24–40.

[20] For example, Michael Young and Mark Schafer, "Is There Method in Our Madness? Ways of Assessing Cognition in International Relations," *Mershon International Studies Review* 42/1 (1998), 63–96; Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1/1 (2005), 1–30.

[21] For example, Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[22] Ken Booth, "75 Years On: Rewriting the Subject's Past – Reinventing Its Future," in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 338.

[23] Chris Brown, "Structural Realism, Classical Realism and Human Nature," *International Relations* 23/2 (2009), 257–70; Neta C. Crawford, "Human Nature and World Politics: Rethinking 'Man,'" *International Relations* 23/2 (2009), 271–88.

[24] Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Lamarckian with a Vengeance: Human Nature and American International Relations Theory," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9/3 (2006), 227–46; Annette Freyberg-Inan, "Rational Paranoia and Enlightened Machismo: The Strange Psychological Foundations of Realism," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9/3 (2006), 247–68; Rodney Bruce Hall, "Human Nature as Behaviour and Action in Economics and International Relations Theory," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9/3 (2006), 269–87; Jon Mercer, "Emotional Beliefs," *International Organization* 64/4 (2010), 1–31. On the motivation for the symposium, see Stefano Guzzini, "Note by the Editors. Symposium: The Return of Human Nature in IR Theory?" *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9/3 (2006), 225.

[25] See, e.g., the 2013 ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop "Status Claims, Recognition, and Emotions in IR" as well as the growing number of conference submissions on these themes.

We begin from the observation that, in theorizing humanity and world politics, two basic epistemological options emerge.[26] Both may account for a human element in IR/ir, yet they do so from very different angles. One proceeds by theoretically translating humanity into models of human being(s), seeking to infuse IR theory with accounts of what human beings are like, and what this might mean for how world politics unfold. Such accounts can be inductively or deductively derived, but the basic impulse is empiricist and essentializing. They also tend to be universalist and determinist, inasmuch as IR theory is rarely made contingent on different human types or contexts.

The second basic option is to attempt to capture the mutual implication of humanity and world politics with concepts that forego reference to human being(s). The impulse behind such, typically recent, approaches is anti-essentializing and anti-determinist. If at all, humans here do not figure as "whole beings" but rather as agents, actors, or other conceptual entities alongside other, nonhuman members of the same or related categories. Particularly agency and intentionality are dispersed and decoupled from essential aspects of the human, while they may remain related to essential aspects of *humanity* in the form of collective phenomena. Such theorizing still addresses humanity and human being(s) in IR/ir, but it does so in ways which, (meta)theoretically and typically also epistemologically, are fundamentally different from the more traditional first option. To emphasize the contrast through labeling, we might say that IR either studies world politics through an *anthropological* lens that places the human at the center of its observation or through a *post-anthropological* one that chooses to de-center the human to different extents.

This categorical reduction calls for three essential caveats. One, this distinction is used as a heuristic device only. It does not invoke classical dialectics in the sense of a binary to be synthesized into a "superior" unity. To the contrary, as a symmetric distinction it constitutes a difference under which neither side can be reduced to the other while both assume shape only against the other.[27] We find this distinction to be a productive starting point as it draws attention to what is in- and excluded when theorizing world politics from either side and, in doing so, enables the

[26] That is unless we choose to exclude humanity from our studies, i.e. we literally ignore our existence. One may very well forego notions of the human from an *analytical* perspective. However, a negation of its (co-)implication in the empirical phenomena composing world politics seems absurd.

[27] Claiming a post-anthropological perspective without the alternative of a (non)anthropological one makes no sense. Yet, while working "within" either one perspective, scholars tend to block out the respective alternative. Within the overall framework of the volume, the heuristic thus acts as a failsafe against such blind spots.

volume to say more about the productivity and effects of possible theoretical relations of the human and world politics than either of the two perspectives can standing alone.[28] Two, this distinction, then, does not imply that world politics only occurs either with or without humanity. Rather, it directs attention toward the *analytical angles* scholars use to study either one or both. Three, semantically, the term "anthropology" does not refer to the scholarly fields of Political Anthropology or Ethnology. Instead, its intended meaning is found in its etymological roots in Greek, a combination of the terms *ánthropos* (man) and *lógos* (study). Hence, "anthropology" means the study of world politics via a human-centered framework whereas "post-anthropology" implies a reaction to anthropological approaches that draws away from such frameworks.

From both sides of this fault line, the contributors to this volume are united in the quest to understand how, why, and to which ends the human has been or must (not) be built into IR theories, how we hence come to see world politics, and how such theoretical moves impact on the position and significance assigned to humanity in world politics. We therefore further reflexively tweak the preceding reformulation of Ruggie's question, to read: "How do notions of 'the human' make the world of IR/ir hang together?" The contributors to this volume set out to reveal conceptions of humanity and human being(s) across the spectrum of IR theory, their promotion and dismissal, and in this way bring to light the discipline's *homo absconditus*, the mystery of the human in IR/ir.[29] They do so by exposing attempts to discipline and reify views of the human in IR, breaking them open, comparing them to possible alternatives, and discussing their theoretical and practical consequences.

To prepare us for such an enquiry, this introduction proceeds as follows: first, we further explicate the relevance of a systematic reflection on the role of the human in IR. We then take a closer look at how the human has been implicitly or explicitly addressed in IR theorizing to date. From this discussion we extract some of the core challenges for theorizing the human in/and world politics from here on, based on which, in turn, we develop the rationale for the organization of the volume and provide an overview of its contributions.

[28] Note that in Chapter 6, Ned Lebow sets out to circumvent this distinction while Jan Passoth and Nick Rowland in Chapter 14 want to "test its outer limits." Yet, this only goes to show the productivity of this heuristic: by reflexively flagging its boundaries, it also marks the entry points for alternative routes of debate.

[29] We are borrowing from Plessner only the term, not his theoretical inclinations; see Helmuth Plessner, "Homo absconditus," in Günter Dux et al. (eds.), *Helmuth Plessner, Gesammelte Schriften VIII: Conditio humana* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), pp. 356–66.

The relevance of studying the human in IR

Self-reflection not only is a trait commonly attributed to humans, it also makes up for a major part of disciplinary proceedings. In IR, there has been at least a co-equal amount of commentary on how such self-reflection serves the attainment and consolidation of scientific prestige and distracts scholars from so-called real-world challenges and the achievement of knowledge. While this accusation may not be entirely unfounded, exposing and debating our analytical tools with regard to concepts of the human does not imply yet another autistic intradisciplinary debate.

IR and ir are joined at the hip, and a thorough discussion of our concepts of the human must not only account for their field-specific logics but also for their inextricable linkages and mutual influences: IR reflects (on) ir and ir in turn imports these reflections. The following section therefore merely *starts* from an intradisciplinary perspective by further developing and justifying the previous section's thesis that IR needs to examine its theoretical accounts of the human. The view will then expand to further substantiate the relevance of a study of the human by including perspectives on the human in the domains of world politics and science and acknowledging how they affect IR theorizing. The last part will then look at the broader public debate on the human and the role of IR within it.

Concepts of the human in IR theory

As already indicated in the first section of this introduction, concepts of the human are clearly pivotal for much of IR theorizing. There is a broad, historically grown consensus that the world is a human world and that world politics is thus a human domain. Hence, to most scholars it does seem impossible to explain world politics without making at least implicit assumptions about the human. After all, without such assumptions it seems difficult to explain why our bodies move at all, let alone to account for their direction or resistance to societal pressures.[30] Accordingly, in IR, the human appears in manifold terminological shapes and forms: as actor, agent, subject, individual, person, body/being, self, mind, psyche, and so forth.

Probably the most prominent but also most notorious placeholder to account for the human in world politics, however, must be "human nature." The concept itself and its history impress on us the need to

[30] Paraphrasing Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 131.

scrutinize our concepts of the human. Like many of the previously listed concepts, human nature describes particular qualities of the human (as) being which are believed to be relevant to the attempted study of world politics. There is not one but many underlying concepts of human nature under foot in IR, and "different conceptions of human nature lead to different views about what we ought to do and how we can do it, because they amount to world views that claim not just intellectual assent but practical action."[31] However, scholars often use these conceptions *implicitly* and do not substantiate them through empirical evidence or philosophical argument. Due to their typical implicitness, they are not only a "conceptual bedrock for socio-political discourse," but also an "untestable bedrock of many theories of politics."[32] As a result, quite frequently, such conceptions survive while representing only a highly "selective observation of human behaviour, which is then amplified into a selective description of the world and how to study it."[33]

Notably, while the explicit use of a human nature concept typically indicates an anthropological (as opposed to post-anthropological) take on the human and/in IR, (implicit) concepts of human nature or the human are manifest in both foundationalist and post-foundationalist IR scholarship. Although the concept of human nature employed in realism has received the most scrutiny in the past years,[34] concepts of the human are not only engrained in realist theories but lurk "behind the curtains of all other IR theoretical perspectives."[35]

As much as the human seems pivotal to IR theorizing, it is interesting to note that there seems to be no agreement as to what empirical unit(y) exactly the human as a concept may denote. The myriad of available concepts shows that even among those who put the human at the center, not much conceptual cohesion exists. The human as a concept thus has become problematic unto itself. Meanwhile, inasmuch as humanity, in the broadest sense, is still postulated to be at the heart of political

[31] Sterling-Folker, "Lamarckian with a Vengeance," 230.
[32] Steve Smith, "Introduction," in Forbes and Smith (eds.), *Politics and Human Nature*, p. 2.
[33] Sterling-Folker, "Lamarckian with a Vengeance," 229. Donald Moon already argued more broadly in the 1970s that "[u]nfortunately, it cannot be said that most theories in political science are based on clear, well-articulated images of man. On the contrary, the fundamental conceptions of human rationality, purposes, sociality, etc., tend to be left vague and inarticulate, and all too often they are shifted as one moves from one context to another" (*The Logic of Political Inquiry*, p. 194).
[34] For example, Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man*; Brown, "Structural Realism, Classical Realism and Human Nature"; Robert Schuett, *Political Realism, Freud, and Human Nature in International Relations: The Resurrection of the Realist Man* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).
[35] Sterling-Folker, "Lamarckian with a Vengeance," 230.

processes,[36] underlying ideas of the human remain powerful conceptual aspects in the (re)construction of theories of world politics.

The first reason for the relevance of scrutinizing our concepts of the human in this volume is, then, that we have so far lacked any structured debates which could expose IR's underlying ideas of the human and their consequences. The still dominant mainstream view that most concepts of the human are either analytically insignificant or dangerously reifying, and thus need to be sidestepped,[37] represents part of the problem rather than a solution. The still mostly unreflective use of these clearly vital concepts dangerously promotes theories that contain unspoken (political) implications and prevent accountable analyses of world politics.

Concepts of the human in world politics and science

The relevance of the study of concepts of the human becomes even more obvious once we leave the narrow confines of IR theory behind and broaden our view to world politics. Here, the above-mentioned notion that the human obviously holds a focal point but at the same time seems to be open to contention clearly resonates. The concept of human security and, by extension, the responsibility to protect stand out as particularly evocative examples of a contemporary focus on the human and its highly contested consequences.[38] After all, the concept of human security features no less than a rereading of security through the human as a referent object, rather than through the state or its capabilities. What is more, this perspective comes with a specific understanding of what being human entails and what humans are – embodied individuals and moreover persons. Without a doubt, the invoked notions of individuality and personhood come with a long history in Western (political) thought. It is therefore not surprising that, for example, the dispute over the enforcement of human rights through intervention is led most intensely with regard to those regions with arguably different concepts of the human, of individuality, of what constitutes personhood and of what is hence in need of protection.[39]

[36] For a recent appropriation, see Mary Ann Tétreault and Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Global Politics As If People Mattered* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 183: "[I]t is the social individual who is at the heart of global politics and, indeed, is both its architect and building block."

[37] Sterling-Folker, "Lamarckian with a Vengeance," 230.

[38] The concept was introduced via the United Nations Human Development Report 1994, see: http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/chapters/ [last accessed November 7, 2013].

[39] Stephan Stetter and Jochen Walter, "Let's Play the Game of Human Rights: The Constitution of Global Political Order and the Rise of Individual Actorhood in World Society," unpublished manuscript (2013).