

Being human

*"I can't even guess myself what it must be
to live a life of a human being."
(Osamu Dazai, "No Longer Human")*

I have recently read a book "No Longer Human" by Osamu Dazai. It is about a man who considers himself a fraud, "disqualified as a human being". For him, life among humans is a "burning hell". Most of the book is autobiographical, and, so as the hero, the author eventually committed suicide. When I was reading it, I recognised that I felt exactly the same way when I was severely depressed. I would jokingly say to myself that I probably fell from the moon, so alien and out of place I felt in the human society. I identified myself with the protagonists of "Steppenwolf" and "The Stranger" – another two outsiders who doubt their humanness.

Isn't it surprising, how many human beings feel like they don't belong into human race? It seems like a contradiction in itself. What does it actually mean to be "human"? Well, according to the dictionary, "a human is a member of the species Homo Sapiens." That's all there is to that. In particular, I assume that everyone who reads this is a human. (If any of you out there did arrive from another planet – please let me know, I would be delighted to meet you.)

A question arises: What is it that makes people "disqualify" themselves as human beings? What are these erroneous ideas about what "being human" means, which cause so much stress and pain?

Well, the problem is that the society teaches us that we are only valuable if we behave like superhumans: "Don't make mistakes, don't show your weakness, don't be jealous, don't ask for help, don't cry..." In our attempt to live up to these standards we end up in a vicious circle. People are trying to maintain a perfect image all the time and at all costs, which makes other people think that this is normal and compels them to raise their standards even higher. And not being able to live up to what is now considered "normal" leads to depressions and suicides.

But the truth is: Making mistakes is human, crying is human, hurting when you are wounded is human. Welcome to the human condition. Desperately longing for connection and being locked within one's own subjective experience. Optimised for survival by millennia of evolution and knowing that death is unavoidable. Being told by society that how you feel and what you are is despicable, pathological, unacceptable. In this world, how valuable it is to remind people what "being human" actually means! Making mistakes, messing up, falling and getting up again, crying, asking for help, not hiding your wounds, being honest about how you feel, showing that you can live with all that and that your life is still as valuable as anyone else's. How many suicides could be prevented with that attitude?

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