

Lauri Vahtre (born in 1960) is an Estonian politician, historian, and cultural scholar, Ph.D. He was active in Estonia's liberation process at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s and participated in the elaboration of Estonia's new constitution. Since 1992 he has repeatedly been elected to the Estonian Parliament. As an MP he actively supported the policy of Estonia's democratization and transition to market economy, which was implemented by Mart Laar, the prime minister. He has written a number of books about more and less recent history, mostly from the perspective of mental history. Vahtre has also tried his hand as a playwright and a translator; he has published several textbooks. His numerous essays stand out for their polemical spirit.



This lengthy and fascinating essay focuses on the question 'What does it mean to be a human being?'; it argues for the view that a human can act as a human only by communication with other humans, which in turn inevitably implies morality, culture, division of labour between the sexes, etc. Many of these phenomena are nowadays regarded as old-fashioned or un-humanistic. Vahtre shows that such a view of humanism might contradict the foundations of being human. Has humanistic ideology reached a crisis? Vahtre claims that already this century should provide an answer whether the developed Western world will witness a triumph or great disappointment.

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