Historically: answered in terms of positive qualities, capacities, attributes;

Most influentially: reason, language: speech (*logos*) as opposed to mere noise (*phonē*);

Also in terms of oppositions: human/animal, human/machine.
On the dangers of positive definitions

Post-WWII: some concentration camp survivors argue that any positive definition allows some people to be excluded from 'humanity' by being described as 'subhuman'.

Robert Antelme

The worst victim can do no other than to affirm that, in its most extreme form, the power of the executioner cannot be other than that of man: the power of murder. He can kill a man, but he cannot change him into something else.


Primo Levi

You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who does not know peace
Who fights for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman.
Without hair and without name
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.

Primo Levi, If This is a Man (1947) (London: Abacus, 1987), p.17

In place of positive qualities

Vulnerability, exposure;

Ineradicable humanity: not as force but as ultimate weakness – no-one can be excluded
And now?

The ‘posthuman’:

But it was ever thus...

Bernard Stiegler

Human always produced by technics:

- Tool use; fire; language; kinship structures;
- External inorganic memory (writing, mobile phones...);
- We have never been ‘human’, but always a human-nonhuman assemblage

Technical prostheses
Jesse Sullivan and Claudia Mitchell with their thought-controlled bionic arms, Washington, D.C.

And next?

The human: beyond its limits?

1: technical protheses, from the very beginning;
2: so ‘transhumanism’?
3: or: exposure, vulnerability: excluding no-one – not even nonhumans?