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The Concept of Humanism
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2.1 Introduction

The word humanism has been freely applied to a variety of beliefs, methods, and philosophies that place central emphasis on what it means to human. Frequently, the term is used with reference to a system of education and mode of inquiry that developed in northern Italy during the 14th century and later spread through Europe and England. Alternately known as “Renaissance humanism,” this program was so broadly and profoundly influential that it is one of the chief reasons why the Renaissance is viewed as a distinct historical period. Humanism has had a long and notable career, with roots reaching far back into the past and deep into the life of civilizations supreme in their day. It has had eminent representatives in all the great nations of the world.

The philosophy of Humanism represents a specific and forthright view of the universe, the nature of human beings, and the treatment of human problems. The term Humanist first came into use in the early sixteenth century to designate the writers and scholars of the European Renaissance. Contemporary Humanism includes the most enduring values of Renaissance Humanism, however, in philosophic scope and significance goes far beyond it.

To define twentieth-century humanism briefly, one would say that “it is a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural
world and advocating the methods of reason, science and democracy.”1 While this statement has many profound implications, it is not difficult to grasp. Humanism in general is not a way of thinking merely for professional philosophers, but is also a credo for average men and women seeking to lead happy and useful lives. It does not try to appeal to intellectuals by laying claim to great originality or to the multitude by promising the easy fulfillment of human desires either upon this earth or in some supernatural dream world. But Humanism does make room for the various aspects of human nature. Though it looks upon reason as the final arbiter of what is true, good and beautiful, it insists that reason should fully recognize the emotional side of human beings. Indeed, one of the main objective of Humanism is to set free the emotions from cramping and irrational restrictions.2

Humanism is a many-faceted philosophy, congenial to this modern age, yet fully aware of the lessons of history and the richness of the philosophic tradition. Its task is to organize into a consistent and intelligible whole the chief elements of philosophic tradition. Its task is to organize into a consistent and intelligible whole the chief elements of philosophic truth and to make that synthesis a powerful force and reality in the minds and actions of living persons. Humanism is not a new dogma, but is a developing philosophy ever open to experimental testing newly discovered facts and more rigorous reasoning.

The Humanist philosophy persistently strives to remind us that our only home is in this mundane world. There is no use in our searching elsewhere for happiness and fulfillment, for there is no place else to go. We human beings must find our destiny and our promised land in the here and now, or not at all. And Humanism is interested in a future life, not in the sense of some fabulous paradise in the skies,
but as the ongoing enjoyment of earthly existence by generation after generation through eternities of time.

Since we live during a time of nationalism run wild, of terrible world wars, of hate and misunderstanding between peoples and governments, I want to underscore at the start Humanism’s goal of the welfare of all humankind. In its primary connotation, Humanism simply means ‘human-being-ism,’ that is, devotion to the interests of human beings, wherever they live and whatever their status.³

Our increasing dependence on the machine and on scientific techniques tends to do away with old-time appeals to the supernatural. The stronghold of supernatural religion has always been in the country rather than in the city.

Humanism as a word has several meanings and it is essential to distinguish among them. If we are considering the history of culture, the term usually refers to the European Renaissance or awakening, which started in Italy during the fourteenth century and later spread to the rest of the continent and to England. Renaissance Humanism was first and foremost a revolt against the other-worldliness of medieval Christianity, a turning away from preoccupation with personal immortality to making the best of life in this world. Renaissance writers like Rebelais and Erasmus gave eloquent voice to this new joy in living and to the sheer exuberance of existence. For the Renaissance the ideal human being was no longer the ascetic monk, but a new type to called universal or ‘Renaissance man,’ who was a many-sided personality, delighting in every kind of this-earthly achievement.⁴ The Renaissance also constituted a revolt against the authority of the Catholic Church and against the religious limitations on knowledge.

Humanism is such an old and attractive word and so weighted philosophy it adhered to a false Dualism of human beings versus Nature. And it revived some of
the bad features of Renaissance Humanism by setting up a return to the ancient classics as the foundation stone of education and by opposing the Humanities to science. Finally, it turned the obvious need of human self-control in the sphere of ethics into a prissy and puritanical morality of decorum. This Academic Humanism had only a brief vogue and has all but disappeared from the American scene. Then there is Catholic or Integral humanism stemming from the impressive medieval synthesis of Thomas Aquinas.

Still another version of Humanism was the subjective variety put forward early in this century in England by Professor Schiller. His Humanism, borrowing from the more questionable elements in the Pragmatism of William James, centered around a theory of knowledge in which the personal, subjective human factor was paramount and in which objective truth tended to melt away in the haze of moral and religious wish-fulfillment. Schiller also made unacceptable compromises with supernaturalism. At the same time he was one of the few modern philosophers of note who used the word humanism to denote a whole system of philosophy and who saw the great possibilities of this term.

### 2.2 Origin and Meaning of the Term Humanism

The history of the term humanism is complex but enlightening. It was first employed (as humanismus) by 19th-century German scholars to designate the Renaissance emphasis on classical studies in education. These studies were pursued and endorsed by educators known, as early as the late 15th century, as umanisti: that is, professors or students of classical literature. The word umanisti derives from the studia humanitatis, a course of classical studies that, in the early 15th century, consisted of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral
philosophy. The *studia humanitatis* were held to be the equivalent of the Greek *paideia*. Their name was itself based on the Latin *humanitas*, an educational and political ideal that was the intellectual basis of the entire movement. Renaissance humanism defined itself as an aspiration toward this ideal of virtue and wisdom.\(^6\)

*Humanitas* meant the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent. The term thus implied not only such qualities as are associated with the modern word humanity—understanding, benevolence, compassion, mercy—but also more aggressive characteristics as fortitude, judgment, prudence, eloquence, and even love of honour. Consequently the possessor of *humanitas* could not be merely a sedentary and isolated philosopher or man of letters but was of necessity a participant in active life. Just as action without insight was held to be aimless and barbaric, insight without action was rejected as barren and imperfect. *Humanitas* called for a fine balance of action and contemplation, a balance born not of compromise but of complementarity. The goal of such fulfilled and balanced virtue was political in the broadest sense of the world. The preview of Renaissance humanism included not only the education of the young but also the guidance of adults (including rulers) via philosophical poetry and strategic rhetoric. It included not only realistic social criticism but also utopian hypotheses, not only painstaking reassessments of history but also bold reshapings of the future. In short, humanism called for the comprehensive reform of culture, the transfiguration of what humanists termed the passive and ignorant society of the "dark" ages into a new order that would reflect and encourage the grandest human potentialities. Humanism had an evangelical dimension: it sought to project *humanitas* from the individual into the state at large.\(^7\)
Some popular **definitions of Humanism** are as given below:

1. “Rejection of religion in favour of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts.”
   
   - *Collins Concise Dictionary*

2. “A non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values.”
   
   - *Little Oxford Dictionary*

3. “Believing that it is possible to live confidently without metaphysical or religious certainty and that all opinions are open to revision and correction, [Humanists] see human flourishing as dependent on open communication, discussion, criticism and unforced consensus.”
   
   - *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*

4. “A system of values and beliefs that is based on the idea that people are basically good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion.”

   - *New Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary*

### 2.3 The Roots of Humanism

The wellspring of *humanitas* was classical literature. Greek and Roman thought, available in a flood of rediscovered or newly translated manuscripts, provided humanism with much of its basic structure and method. For Renaissance humanists, there was nothing dated or outworn about the writings of Plato, Cicero, or Livy. Classical philosophy, rhetoric, and history were seen as models of proper method efforts to come to terms, systematically and without preconceptions of any
kind, with perceived experience. Classical virtue was not an abstract essence but a quality that could be tested in the forum or on the battlefield.

Humanism looked forward to a rebirth of a lost human spirit and wisdom. In the course of striving to recover it, however, the Humanists assisted in the consolidation of a new spiritual and intellectual outlook and in the development of a new body of knowledge. The effect of Humanism was to help men break free from the mental strictures imposed by religious orthodoxy, to inspire free inquiry and criticism, and to inspire a new confidence in the possibilities of human thought and creations.

Among the different topics that have marked the intersection of analytical thinking and other philosophical perspectives, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and pragmatism, “the study of man” is perhaps among those, which have been less explored. With this expression, I intend to refer that field of research crossing the whole Twentieth Century which aims at answering to contemporary challenges through the redefinition of the place of the modern man and of his relationships to the social and natural world. If we consider the strenuous interest of Husserl and his followers to the problem of inter-subjectivity and of the life-world, the methodical reformulation of interpretation and of communicative processes in the hermeneutical tradition, the primacy of linguistic games in Wittgenstein’s conception of Weltbild and not lastly, Dewey’s conception of a naturalistic humanism, we can easily identify in these different assumptions a shared philosophical intuition: that of a new humanism.

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. 12
For Humanism the central concern is always the happiness of people in this existence. Against all of these persistent fallacies Humanism has always constituted a vigorous dissenting voice.

2.4 The Humanist Tradition

The first notable Humanist of whom there is reliable record was Protagoras, a Greek teacher and philosopher of the fifth century BCE, to whom Plato devoted an entire dialogue. Protagoras formulated the famous dictum “Man is the measure of all things.” This statement is too vague and subjective to be taken time a daring and unorthodox thought. Protagoras was also an outspoken agnostic. According to Diogenes Laertius, he asserted: “As to the God, I have no means of knowing either that they exist or do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life.”

For these and similar iconoclastic sentiments the Athenians accused Protagoras of impiety, banished him, and “burnt his works in the market place, after sending around a herald to collect them from all who had copies in their possession.”

A number of other Greek philosophers in the fifth century BCE showed a Humanist bent in that time they, too, concentrated on the analysis of humankind rather than on the analysis of physical Nature, as the earlier generation of Greek thinkers had done. Most of them, like Protagoras, were Sophists, that is, wandering ‘teachers of wisdom’ who discussed practically all the major issues that have ever arisen in philosophy. Plato criticized and satirized the Sophists in a way that was somewhat unfair, making them the foil of a fellow Sophist, the wise and lovable Socrates, intellectual and moral hero of warned the Dialogues. Socrates brilliantly expounded typically Humanist maxims such as “Know thyself” and
“The good individual in the good society.” While believing in a God himself and having hopes of immortality, he tried to work out an ethical system that would function independently of religious doctrine. TA, the Phaedo, the Symposium and the all-embracing Republic itself—there is an abundance of mellow ethical philosophy, relevant for Humanism that can be shifted out from the frequently super naturalist and antidemocratic currents of thought in these works.

Plato (427-347 B.C.), the ideal disciple of Socrates, also put emphasis upon man's rational and moral nature, and held that the ultimate aim of human life is the fullest development of the individuality of man as a moral being by living a life of reason for the attainment of the moral good. According to Plato, the four cardinal virtues of man are wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. He held the view that the ruler of the ideal state must be a philosopher, possessed of moral virtues.

The first great naturalist in the history of philosophy, thought by no means a consistent one, was Aristotle, most universal of Greek philosophers, who lived in the fourth century BCE Aristotle, student of Plato at the renowned Academy in Athens and tutor of Alexander the Great, was a biologist and psychologist as well as a philosopher. He not only provided powerful view for the life of reason by clarifying and codifying the laws of logic, but was also the founder of science as a discipline and an organized, interrelated body of fact. His broad and penetrating genius.

According to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), man is a social animal, who cannot live without society. He who does not or cannot live in society, because he has no need or he is incapable of, is either a god or a beast. State originated from society and man's social and moral good is the highest end of the state.
‘Aristotelian’ psychology, which looks upon human beings as a living combination of soul and body. This view rules out the possibility of a personal after existence; nevertheless Aristotle talked of the ‘active intellect’ as immortal, without meaning that he thought there was a worthwhile future life for the full human personality with its memory and sense of self-identity. He likewise used the word God in a abstract manner very different from its customary significance. Aristotle’s God was not a personal one consciously caring for the world and humankind, but the Prime Mover, an Unmoved Magnet, the eternal source of motion in the universe, stirring everything through the force of attraction.

St. Anselm (1053-1109 A.D.) held that the human soul is eternal and like God. Love of God and His creation is the supreme end of human life. Man commits sin by the misuse of his freedom of will, as did Adam and Eve, for which all human beings have to suffer, and Jesus Christ had to sacrifice his life for the redemption of mankind from sin.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) considers man to be the repository of the rational soul having memory, imagination and rational faculty, from which there arises the knowledge of man. While explaining the nature of man, Bacon first puts emphasis upon the culture of knowledge. According to him, the knowledge that is of no avail, or has no utility in man's practical life, has no value. The real end of the culture of knowledge is the establishment of the power and mastery of man over Nature. Whatever is necessary in order to make human life meaningful, to procure that is the ultimate end of the culture of knowledge. ‘Knowledge is power’ is the famous saying of Bacon, as Socrates said, ‘knowledge is virtue.’
Rene Descartes (1596-1660), known as the father of modern European Philosophy, also put much emphasis upon the problems centering man like many other philosophical problems. In fact, the main object of his philosophical discussion was to find out the nature of human soul and to prove it. According to him, the human soul is a spiritual substance, and he tried to prove it by his method of doubt. His principle ‘cogito ergo sum’ (I think, therefore, I exist) is the last point of his doubting process and the first point of his positive philosophy, According to him, everything can be doubted except the act of doubting and also the doubter. Now, as doubting is a kind of thinking, he argues that just as there can be no doubting without a doubter, so there cannot be thinking without a thinker, i.e., the human soul as a spiritual substance. However, he has explained the nature of man in terms of mechanical materialism. In his opinion, man is a machine like the vegetables and the living creatures. Of course, man is not merely a material body, but a conscious soul within a body, an embodied spirit.

Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) explores man as a finite substance possessing thought and self-consciousness. He does not believe in man's freedom of the will. According to him, God is an infinite substance having infinite attributes, two of which are thought and extension. Man is only one of the infinite modes of God who is identical with Nature and Substance. According to Spinoza, man has no freedom of will, and as such, he has no obligation or responsibility for his actions.

Spinoza meant, by immortality not the duration of the personality beyond the grave, but the attainment of a certain high quality of thought and action in the present existence; and the fact that a person's life, when it is over, becomes a part of the unchanging and eternal past. By God he meant, not a super material being
possessed the attributes of purpose, justice, consciousness, and love, but simply the totality of Nature. He is often referred to as “the God-intoxicated man.” The truth is that Spinoza did not believe in either God or immortality as usually defined; but subject as he was to persecution by both church and state on account of his unorthodox ideas, it may be that he stayed out of jail and preserved his life through his highly intellectualized redefinitions of God and immortality.

Spinoza had good grounds for being nervous, since Bruno had been executed as a heretic at the beginning of the seventeenth century and Galileo had been forced to recant by the Inquisition during Spinoza's own lifetime.

Leibintz (1646-1716), another rationalist, holds that this world is the best of all possible worlds. God has created all things of the world for the happiness and well-being of man. Man possesses freedom of will, which cannot be controlled by any obligation or compulsion.

The empiricists, like Locke, Berkeley and Hume, also placed man at the centre of their philosophical discussion.

Kant (1724-1804) represents man as both a biological and a rational being in such a way that he is quite conscious of his sense of duty and idea of morality. According to him, man as a biological being is naturally possessed of feelings and emotions, desires and instincts. Again, as a rational being, he has control over them. He is considered to be a moral being, when he is guided solely by his sense of duty by controlling his animal desires and inclinations. This requires active volition or will, and in this respect, he has freedom or liberty.

Naturalism, everywhere a minority and unpopular viewpoint for all but a fraction of history, lapsed again to a large degree until the second half of the nineteenth
It then came back into the mainstream of Western thought with renewed vigor, receiving a fresh and lasting impulse from Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, through marshaling incontestable evidence of the evolution of humans from lower forms of life, was to demonstrate that no wide and impassable gulf exists between *Homo sapiens* and the rest of nature. This undermined some of the most powerful arguments of religious supernaturalism and of the traditional philosophies associated with it, giving most convincing support to the major naturalist thesis that human beings and all of their experience are in every respect a part of Nature.

Naturalist trends in Europe greatly increased as a result of Darwin's work. However the revival of Naturalism as an explicit philosophy in intellectual and academic circles took place chiefly in the United States, where it’s strongest and most influential school developed at Columbia university under the original inspiration of Professors John Dewey and Frederick J. E. Woodbridge.

John Dewey, who saw so clearly the full implications for philosophy of the Darwinian revolution in biology, was born in the very year in which *The Origin of Species* appeared. It is Dewey’s hardheaded, empirical viewpoint, as set forth in books like *Experience and Nature* and *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, that constitutes the most scientific and up-to-date version of Naturalism. He completely discards all supernatural forces and entities and regards mind as an instrument of survival and adaptation developed in the long process of evolution.

Dewey is the twentieth-century philosopher who so far has best understood modern science and scientific method and who most cogently developed their meaning for philosophy and culture. Throughout he places reliance on experimental intelligence as the most dependable way to solve the problems that
face the individual and society. Now intelligence, reason, thought, when most effective, are all nothing more nor less than scientific method in operation; and Dewey’s most persistent plea is that we should apply that method to every sector of our lives and that the most profound need of our day is to extend scientific thinking from the natural sciences to the broad field of social, economic, and political affairs. His full-fledged Naturalism is, then, a massive philosophic system which is not only itself based on science, but which also considers the advancement of science in every sphere as the best hope of the human race.

Materialism, holding that the foundation stone of all being is matter in motion. Materialism has stressed matter as such more than Nature and tended until recently to oversimplify and over mechanize, reducing in theory the whole complex behavior of living creatures and human beings to the operation of the same laws that apply to inanimate existence.

Materialism has exercised as long and far-reaching an influence of human thought as Naturalism. The earlier Greek philosophers of the sixth century BCE, men like Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus, tended in the direction of a naive Materialism. They made brilliant guesses to the effect that everything is part of one substance or stuff such as water, air, or fire. The first complete and consistent materialist, however, was Democritus, the so-called laughing philosopher, who flourished about the year 400 BCE and developed systematically the idea that the whole universe is composed in the last analysis of tiny material particles-atoms of different size, shape, and configuration whirling swiftly through the void and interacting according to a definite causal sequence. Thus Democritus was the father of the atomic theory, finally proved true by science some 2300 years later.
More than a century later Epicurus took over the theory of Democritus, adding the important point that in the swirl of the atoms chance deviations take place that break the chain of complete determinism and make room for human freedom of choice. Epicurus had strong ethical grounds for preferring a materialistic system, since he wanted to see people live in the light of reason and without fear. Accordingly, he tried to eliminate apprehensions about the supernatural by teaching that there were no deities who intervened in human affairs and also that human beings were mortal and had no existence after death. This negation of religious doctrines was a prerequisite, in the judgment of Epicurus, for attaining individual happiness on earth. Such happiness he defined in terms of the more refined pleasure, guided by wisdom and adjusted to the hard realities of life. The Epicureans placed affection or friendship among the highest goods of experience. Epicurus himself retired to his garden to live quietly, abstemiously, and nobly, achieving a kind of philosophic saintliness. Yet Epicureanism has come to mean merely the pursuit of sensual enjoyment; and Epicurus remains perhaps the outstanding example of a great philosopher who has been perpetually misunderstood.

Like Naturalism, Materialism as a system found little favor or expression during the long period between the civilizations of antiquity and the modern era. Following the efforts of Francis Bacon, himself no materialist, on behalf of a revival of science to substitute (in Bacon’s terms) the Empire of Man over Nature for that of Man over Man, his former secretary, Thomas Hobbes, gave Materialism a methodical and thoroughgoing formulation in the seventeenth century.

According to Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), man is a being endowed with the inspiration and tendency to self-preservation and self-expansion, man is naturally
desirous of power. While Aristotle said that man is a social animal, Hobbes says that man is selfish and ferocious by nature. A man is the enemy of another man. Hobbe’s interpretation of Materialism was unusual in that he made it the basis for political conservatism and suggested that God was corporeal.

Auguste Comte, French thinker of the middle nineteenth century, made a stimulating if somewhat erratic approach to a consistent Humanism. Taking the facts and methods of science as his starting point, Comte worked out a far-reaching system, which he called Positivism. He used the word positive, not as the opposite of negative, but as meaning scientifically certain or assured.

For the worship of God he substituted the worship of humankind and for the calendar of Christian saints a select list of the heroes of human progress.

In England the versatile John Stuart Mill developed and included in his philosophy of Utilitarianism the more scientific aspects of Comte's work, shunning its religious and mystical elements. Mill's writings also served as an invaluable stimulus to the democratic ideals that mean so much to Humanism. His essay On Liberty ranks with Milton's Are-opagitica as one of the classic statements on freedom of thought and the rights of the individual. "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion," declared Mill, "and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind....All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility." 17

Species and who continued, after that notable event, to apply the evolutionary hypothesis to every sector of human history and thought. Spencer promoted his
interpretation of evolution with such zeal that he overreached and discredited himself. For he advocated a hard-boiled theory, supposedly based on the Darwinian principle of the survival of the fittest, that in society the economically successful, the biologically fit, and the morally good are roughly equivalent. In regard to supernaturalism, Spencer was an agnostic, that is, one who believes there is not sufficient evidence either to prove or disprove the existence of God and immortality. The originator of the useful word agnostic was Thomas H. Huxley, noted English biologist and popularized of the Darwinian theory. Since agnostics are doubtful about the supernatural, they tend to be Humanists in practice.

Unquestionably the great religious leaders like Buddha and Confucius and Jesus have made a substantial contribution, on the ethical side, to the Humanist tradition.

Buddha's sayings, such as those embodied in the Eightfold Path of Virtue, dealt primarily with a code of conduct for this world. He was not interested in ordinary religious rituals, sacrifices, and other observances. He believed that people could overcome the miseries of life by giving up their narrow personal aims and tormenting desires. It was a high doctrine of altruism and self-renunciation, with a somewhat negative and individualistic emphasis on one's avoidance of pain and sorrow rather than an affirmative stress on building happiness within the good society and through social co-operation.

Confucius was much more concerned with political and social life than Buddha and presented the ideal of the noble being in the noble state. He laid his heaviest stress on an ethical system which looked to people's happiness here and now and, like the ethics of Plato and Aristotle, exalted the importance of knowledge and of human inter-relationships. Concerning survival beyond the grace, Confucius
would only say: "While you do not know life, what can you know about death?" He was equally uncertain concerning God and the gods.

Lin Yutang, the contemporary Chinese author, is convinced that Confucius was a true Humanist; and he describes Chinese Humanism, faithful to the spirit of Confucius, in this way: “For the Chinese the end of life lies not in life after death, for the idea that we live in order to die, as taught by Christianity, is incomprehensible; nor in Nirvana, for that is too metaphysical; nor in the satisfaction of accomplishment, for that is too vainglorious; nor yet in progress for progress's sake, for that is meaningless. The true end, the Chinese have decided in a singularly clear manner, lies in the enjoyment of a simple life, especially the family life, and in harmonious social relationships.... There is no doubt that the Chinese are in love with life, in love with this earth, and will not forsake it for an invisible heaven. They are in love with life, which is so sad and yet so beautiful, and in which moments of happiness are so precious because they are so transient.”

Turning to the West, we find that the Old Testament Hebrews, despite their vigorous supernaturalism, had little faith in a worthwhile immortality for the human personality and were primarily interested in the future of the tribe or nation in this world.

Two books of the Old Testament are themselves among the greatest Humanist documents in all literature. Passing to the New Testament, we see plainly that its theology, taken literally, is totally alien to the humanist viewpoint.

Humanism, than, holds that certain of the teachings of Jesus possess and ethical import that will always be an inspiration for the human race, and that the Jesus
portrayed by the gospel represents one of the supreme personalities of all time. He was the most effective fighter against the hidebound Pharisees of his day, the greatest free speech victim in the history of religion, and a radiant martyr for the cause of humanity.

2.5 Basic Ideas of Humanism

Humanism is one of those philosophies for people who think for themselves. There is no area of thought that a Humanist is afraid to challenge and explore.

Humanism is a system that is concerned only with the human being, (and not with the divine), interest with the human race as a whole. Everything has been humanized and each individual is required to be humane, in Humanism the term ‘man’ is not to be taken in the Protagorian sense, it is not to be considered to be a Platonic concept.

Humanism is a philosophy focused upon human means for comprehending reality. Humanists make no claims to possess or have access to supposed transcendent knowledge.

Humanism is a philosophy of reason and science in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, when it comes to the question of the most valid means for acquiring knowledge of the world, Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation, and altered states of consciousness.

Humanism is a philosophy of imagination. Humanists recognize that intuitive feelings, hunches, speculation, flashes of inspiration, emotion, altered states of consciousness, and even religious experience, while not valid means to acquire knowledge, remain useful sources of ideas that can lead us to new ways of looking
at the world. These ideas, after they have been assessed rationally for their usefulness, can then be put to work, often as alternative approaches for solving problems.

Humanism is a philosophy for the here and now. Humanists regard human values as making sense only in the context of human life rather than in the promise of a supposed life after death.

Humanism is a philosophy of compassion. Humanist ethics is solely concerned with meeting human needs and answering human problems-for both the individual and society-and devotes no attention to the satisfaction of the desires of supposed theological entities.

Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanists recognize the existence of moral dilemmas and the need for careful consideration of immediate and future consequences in moral decision making.

Humanism is in tune with the science of today. Humanists therefore recognize that we live in a natural universe of great size and age that we evolved on this planet over a long period of time, that there is no compelling evidence for a separable "soul," and that human beings have certain built-in needs that effectively form the basis for any human-oriented value system.

Humanism is in tune with today's enlightened social thought. Humanists are committed to civil liberties, human rights, church-state separation, the extension of participatory democracy not only in government but in the workplace and education, an expansion of global consciousness and exchange of products and ideas internationally, and an open-ended approach to solving social problems, an approach that allows for the testing of new alternatives.
Humanism is in tune with new technological developments. Humanists are willing to take part in emerging scientific and technological discoveries in order to exercise their moral influence on these revolutions as they come about, especially in the interest of protecting the environment.

Humanism is, in sum, a philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure of being part of new discoveries, seeking new knowledge, exploring new options. Instead of finding solace in prefabricated answers to the great questions of life, humanists enjoy the open-endedness of a quest and the freedom of discovery that this entails.²⁰

2.6 Humanism and Existentialism

Existentialists also fix on ‘man’ they emphatically assert the importance of man as constituting the central theme of Existential Philosophy. Man knows many things, but himself remains unknown. He is the originator of all studies, like Science, Art, Religion and Philosophy, yet he is a mystery to himself.

On 29 October 1945, Sartre delivered a public lecture entitled ‘Is Existentialism a Humanism that was soon to become the manifesto of the existentialist movement.

In “Existentialism and Humanism” Sartre replies to reproaches against Existentialism. In this context as an existentialist he attributes existence only to man and as an atheist he denies the existence of God on grounds. If there is no God, Sartre says, “at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidggger has it, the human reality”. Since existence precedes essence, man first of all exists as nothing and it is only later on that he defines himself, i.e.,
makes himself what he is, and thereby forms a conception of himself. Sartre is really a humanist, in that he admits of no divine authority—no God who is the creator, sustainer, and the destroyer of the universe, the seat of all values and the soul, root of all regulative principles. He declares that but for his given-ness as a free existent and his existence as a man is the author of everything. Everything is human, like choice, decisions, aims, values and even the ran as the embodiment of freedom and as the self transcending subjectivity, each comprehending every other subject in an indefinite sense, occupies the central position in the universe. Since there is no God, man is the only responsible being that freely creates values on earth.

Sartrean existentialism: the claim that 'existence precedes essence'. Given the postulated atheism of Sartre's view, it seemed to follow that individuals were left to create their own values because there was no moral order in the universe by which they could guide their actions, indeed, that this freedom was itself the ultimate value to which one could appeal (as he put it, 'in choosing anything at all, I first of all choose freedom') Now this much could have been gleaned by anyone who had read his masterwork.21

Sartre appealed to Kant's ethic of universal principles (the ones that Kierkegaard's Abraham had suspended for a higher goal) when he said that no one could be free in a concrete sense (and not merely in the abstract sense employed in Being and Nothingness that defines the individual as free) unless everyone were free. “In choosing, I choose for all people”,22 he insisted. And in words that carry a distinctively Kantian ring, Sartre challenges that each agent ought to say to himself: 'Am I he who has the right to act such that humanity regulates itself by
my acts?" This seemed to convey a sense of responsibility for the other person and even for society as a whole that was different from his previous contentions.

In arguing that existentialism is a humanistic philosophy, Sartre means that it places the human being at the centre of its attention and at the apex of its value-hierarchy. Though he mentions theistic existentialists in this lecture, citing Jaspers and Marcel as examples, it is difficult to find room for them in the body of his speech. Rather, he insists that the ultimate value, the goal of our endeavors, should be the fostering of the freedom of the individual, by which he means the enhancement of his or her concrete possibilities of choice. That creative freedom, he implies, should not be sacrificed to any higher value, whether it be the ‘class’ of the Marxists or the ‘God’ of the religious believers. This echoes the image of what Nietzsche called ‘free spirits’ in his “Human, All Too Human”. When Sartre insists that “one must choose, that in invent, he doesn’t mean simply improvise. Rather, he is referring to the responsible decision to opt for or against freedom itself.”

Agreeing with Sartre and Nietzsche that whatever meaning our world may harbour is created by individuals either alone or in social relations, Albert Camus views this as the source of our anguish: we long for meaning conveyed by a Universe that cares but discover only an empty sky. What are we to do in the face of what he calls the 'absurdity' of this situation? Camus offers existential solace in his interpretation of the Greek “myth of Sisyphus”, the mortal condemned by the gods to push a stone up a mountain only to see it roll back down repeatedly for all eternity. And yet Camus claims to consider Sisyphus happy at the moment he turns to retrieve the rock once more at the base of the hill. Why happy? Because
Sisyphus has risen above his fate, not by dull resignation but by deliberate choice. He thereby shows himself superior to this inanimate rock. In Nietzsche’s words, he has turned the 'it was' (his past, the givens of his situation) into the ‘thus I willed it’.

Faced with this parable of the ultimate futility of life, Camus counsels that our only hope is to acknowledge that there is no ultimate hope. Like the Ancient Stoics, we must limit our expectations in view of our mortality.

In “Letter on Humanism” (1947), written ostensibly in response to Sartre's lecture just mentioned, Heidegger is critical of traditional humanism with its definition of 'man' as a 'rational animal' or an 'animal endowed with speech'. Such a conception, in Heidegger's view, sells man short and easily leads to the kind of technological society that defines man in terms of productivity and assesses all values in terms of personal or social utility.

The glory of 'man' (or what Heidegger calls Dasein, meaning the human way of being) is his openness to Being. It is his ability to conserve a place in the world for what Heidegger calls the occurrence of Being. In a well-known expression from his later work, Heidegger calls man/Dasein ‘the shepherd of Being’. It is his glory to remain open and attentive to the ‘call’ or the dimension of the ‘holy’ that eludes our daily concerns. Heidegger counsels that we should learn to ‘dwell poetically’ rather than behaving merely pragmatically. If one accepts this advice, then the later Heidegger can be seen as preaching the 'true' humanism, one that underscores the most profound possibilities of the human. That was his claim in this Letter.

The humanist dimension of existentialism that comes to grips with the fact of our sheer being there. And it is their respective responses to the questions ‘Why do we
exist?’, ‘Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?’, that distinguish the theists from the atheists among them.

The existentialists, both theistic and atheist, take it quite seriously. And how they respond to the propose of humanism. We saw that, for Camus, we were challenged to make the most of an absurd situation.

Existentialism argues that the human being is more than the sum of physical, psychological, and social forces. That more is our consciousness, by which we can assess and respond to these very forces.

As Merleau-Ponty insisted (and Marcel agreed), “I do not have a body, I am my body. It is between these extremes that the existentialist tries to make sense of his or her existence.”

In classical philosophy, we saw how existentialists rejected. Existentialism claims that we are in the world by a relationship of being in which, paradoxically, the subject is our body, our world, and our situation, by a sort of exchange. As Heidegger said, Dasein is in the world initially through its practical concerns and not its theoretical cognition. Merleau-Ponty explains this by focusing his attention on the primacy of our lived bodies.

Though Merleau-Ponty will move beyond existentialism towards the end of his life, sudden death at the age of 53, his contribution to existentialist thought was chiefly in his close analysis of our bodily being and of the 'interworld' of social existence that the early Sartre seemed to discount, if not ignore completely. Merleau-Ponty's early work in experimental psychology distinguished him from most existentialists, who, except for Jaspers, seemed rather indifferent to empirical science.
2.7 Essentials of Humanist Manifesto

It is not wrong to say that the present age is an age of humanism. Philosophical interest has shifted, rightly or wrongly, from God, matter, and science to man. Radhakrishnan wrote: “The world has found itself as one body. But physical unity and economic interdependence are not by themselves sufficient to create a universal human community, a sense of personal relationships among men. Though, this human consciousness was till recently limited to the members of the political states, there has been a rapid extension of it after the War. The modes and customs of all men are now a part of the consciousness of all men. Man has become the spectator of man. A new humanism is on the horizon. But this time it embraces the whole of mankind.”

Philosophy, if it is true to itself, has to be a philosophy of life, not of one part of life but of the whole. This life is the life of man. He wants a theory of life as a guide. Other creatures do not care for any such theory, the drives themselves of their nature are enough for them.

Scientific and analytic thought has helped in dispelling many superstition; but what we want is that this growing scientific and analytic spirit should not also destroy the values of life which are of lasting importance.

Science has not said the last word about what even material things are in themselves, much less has it been able to say about what men are in themselves.

We have to understand ourselves, understand man behind all his activities, scientific, ethical, and spiritual. Science cannot dictate what man is to be; but man must understand what scientific activity is, for it is his activity, Accumulation of
scientific evidence suggests and strengthens a policy, not a creed; but a policy is a
guide to human action. The difference; even in theory, between pure and applied
science is fast disappearing. A true theory is that which works; and work is human
activity.

So we come to the old advice of Socrates: 'Know thy self'. Pope said that the
noblest study of mankind is man himself. The Upanisads also declared: 'Know thy
self' (ātmānanam viddhi). Confucius in China made the same appeal.29

The whole world is coming together more intimately and consciously than ever
before, the problems of each have become the problems of all. It would be
interesting and useful, therefore, to know how man, his nature, his ideals and
values were understood by each tradition.

The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious
beliefs through the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional
attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions
the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions
created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human
activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit
humanism. In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the
undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our
contemporary life demonstrate.

Today man's lager understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and
his deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a
new statement of the means and purposes of religion. Such a vital, fearless, and
frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal
satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past. While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious that any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation.

We appreciate the need to preserve the best ethical teachings in the religious traditions of humankind, many of which we share in common. But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. Traditional religious often offer solace to humans, but, as often, they inhibit humans from helping themselves of experiencing their full potentialities. Too often traditional faiths encourage dependence rather than independence, obedience rather than affirmation, fear rather than courage. More recently they have generated concerned social action, with many signs of relevance appearing in the wake of the “God Is Dead” theologies. But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.

The world cannot wait for a reconciliation of competing political or economic systems to solve its problems. These are the times for men and women of goodwill to further the building of a peaceful and prosperous world. We urge that parochial loyalties and inflexible moral and religious ideologies be transcended. We urge recognition of the common humanity of all people. We further urge the use of reason and compassion to produce the kind of world we want – a world in which peace, prosperity, freedom, and happiness are widely shared. Let us not abandon that vision in despair or cowardice. We are responsible for what we are or will be.
Let us work together for a humane world by means commensurate with humane ends. Destructive ideological differences among communism, capitalism, socialism, conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism should be overcome. Let us call for an end to terror and hatred. We will survive and prosper only in a world of shared humane values. We can initiate new directions for humankind; ancient rivalries can be superseded by broad-based cooperative efforts. The commitment to tolerance, understanding, and peaceful negotiation does not necessitate acquiescence to the status quo nor the damming up of dynamic and revolutionary forces. The true revolution is occurring and can continue in countless non-violent adjustments. But this entails the willingness to step forward onto new and expanding plateaus. At the present juncture of history, commitment to all humankind is the highest commitment of which we are capable; it transcends the narrow allegiances of church, state, party, class, or race in moving toward a wider vision of human potentiality. What more daring a goal for humankind than for each person to become, in ideal as well as practice, a citizen of a world community. It is a classical vision; we can now give it new vitality. Humanism thus interpreted is a moral force that has time on its side. We believe that humankind has the potential intelligence, goodwill, and cooperative skill to implement this commitment in the decades ahead. We, the undersigned, while not necessarily endorsing every detail of the above, pledge our general support to *Humanist Manifesto* for the future of humankind. These affirmations are not a final credo or dogma but an expression of a living and growing faith. We invite others in all lands to join us in further developing and working for these goals.
The commonwealth of humanity has no written constitution; it is based on community of ideals, freedom and dignity of the individual, rule of law, economic opportunity for all citizens and love of peace.

The basic principle of the dignity and freedom of the individual is common to all religious faiths. Marx even denied God, because he believed in the potential divinity of man. The Jain thinkers hold that man can attain divinity, and God is only the highest, noblest and fullest manifestation of all the powers that lie latent in the soul of man. We have a verse in the *Mahabharata* which tells us that there is nothing higher than man on earth:-

“Guhyam brahma tadidam vo bravimi

na manusat sresthataram hi kincit”\textsuperscript{29}
Notes and References


2. Ibid, p.76


4. Ibid, p.98

5. Ibid, p.105

6. Source: *Brittanica Encyclopedia of Philosophy*


15. Ibid, p.141
18. Ibid, p.158
19. Ibid, p.165
23. Ibid, p.265