

Introduction: Humanism in History[§]

The term "humanism" came about in Europe at the end of the 18th and towards the beginning of the 19th century. It emerged with new ideas in human life and its special emphasis on higher education. The basic terms of understanding and interpreting the human world would acquire a new meaning, changing the fundamental dynamics and intellectual signpost for early modern cultural and intellectual life in Europe. This meaning reflected and continued to inspire the general anthropologization of the human world-view and self-understanding. At the same time however, this new meaning of humankind and humanity gained an even wider scope of a denser empirical horizon with an intense normative quality. Empirically, this new understanding was preoccupied with the growing knowledge of human culture in a global perspective; but it also emphasized the varieties and unique differences of human life forms in space and time as localized within their historical changeability. The growing number of travellers and their accounts of new lands and cultures entailed an enormous increase of knowledge about cultural difference, a new knowledge that demanded new frames of understanding and interpretation. The normative impact of this knowledge gave rise to a new conscious awareness of a universal human equality embedded in the term "dignity". This idea of dignity is best encapsulated in Immanuel Kant's ontological qualification of humanity as a subjective quality accessible to all human beings. According to Kant, the human person as the subject of a moral reasoning about his own life and doings has an extreme high

§ We would like to start by expressing our gratitude to two institutions for their support of the humanism project, which is the basis and starting point of our panel and the subsequent collection of essays in this volume for the financial support giving to some of the participants in terms of the travel expenses. Much thanks to the Stiftung Mercator in Essen for sponsoring such ambitious project on intercultural humanism for four years, and to the Berendel foundation in London, which is willing to support a new project on humanism in intercultural dimension and helped to cover the cost of some of our panelists during the conference.

value. This means that every human being (and every social unit as well) is principally more than a means for the purposes of other people, or even of him/herself, but is to be recognized as a purpose within him/herself. S/he is an end in him/herself.

The Kantian proposition is every persuasive. Attributing dignity to each and every human being could be a general definition of humanism. In its modern version, this humanism emphasizes four principles of human life: (1) *human reason* as the ability to make one's own ideas plausible by argumentation; (2) *freedom* of one's own will in guiding all activities in social life; (3) the *creativity* of bringing about peculiar life forms in a broad scale of differences and changes; and (4) the *inter-subjectivity* of negotiating these differences under the rule of mutual critical recognition.

This humanism is the outcome of a long historical process, which introduced the divine quality of the transcendental world into the human nature and thus enriching it with utmost values. In the West, this humanization of humankind started in antiquity. Ancient Greeks created elements of humanism by giving the political order of human life the institution of a polis. Here political decisions were made, not by an appeal to a higher divine will, but to the free will of citizens and their ability to handle common problems of practical life through an open public discussion. Yet, this "humanization" of politics was limited to only a small number of citizens. It was Roman philosophy (Stoa) and political thinking – most prominent in the work of Cicero – which fundamentally recognized and generalized the ability of all humans to use reason as a guide to conduct and a prescriptive ethics in the order of their lives. Reason is a quality accessible and attributable to all human beings. And if everyone possesses this attribute of reason, the human nature is endowed with a fundamental and general value best expressed by the terms "humanitas" and "dignitas". These values were translated into law, the validity of which was made plausible by the idea of natural law (lex

naturae) derived from the order of the cosmos. Thus all social differences were transcended – on the level of intellectual discourse.

Christianity took over this idea of natural law and the high value of being human and strengthened it with the religious concept that man is created as an image of God (*imago Dei*). Christianity especially, radicalized this idea of human dignity with the belief that God himself became man in Jesus, thus reconciling the gap between transcendental divinity and innerworldly human nature. It is within this historical framework of general tendencies that Western humanism took place in two epochs: First, in early modernity where the intellectual revolution started in Italy in the 14th century and dominated the intellectual life all over Europe for centuries; and secondly, at the brink of modernity which is the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, where the humanistic revolution deeply influenced the political culture of Western Europe and North America. It became the moving intellectual force in the emerging humanities and in higher education.¹

During the 19th and 20th century this modern Western humanism was heavily antagonized with the following four dominant critiques: (1) the idea of human equality by virtue of universal reason and liberty was negated by ideologies of human inequality like Social Darwinism. (2) Humanism was deconstructed as pure ideology which asserted the dominating role of male Western middle-class people who – intellectually very powerful – simply legitimated free market economy (capitalism) with all its social tensions and clashes. (3) The third critique interprets humanism as a veil of cultural values covering and hiding the deeply inbuilt inhumanity of modernity. The cultural forces of modernity are identified as dominance of instrumental rationality which dissolves all humane values and replaces them by the blind will of power of men over men or of non-

¹ Paying a close attention to Germany, here the term "Humanismus" (humanism) was made well known by the educationist Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1808), and the term "Humanität" (humanity) was coined by the theologian and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder.

human systems and structures over human subjectivity. (4) The fourth critique of humanism is more philosophical. It qualifies humanism as an outdated way of thinking to be transgressed into a philosophy which is no longer committed to the concentration of thought on the nature/culture of human beings but refers to other basic elements of philosophical discourse like a post-metaphysical ontology (Heidegger) or the overwhelming strength of power-directed discourses defining reality beyond the traditional anthropocentrism of modern world view (Foucault). But despite and against these waves of criticisms Humanism remained. It has survived at least as a source-claim for humaneness against all forms of suppression, destruction, dissolution, humiliation, and negation of human dignity. So the existence of humanism was claimed again and again even after the experiences of massive destruction like the two world wars.

From its very beginning, Western humanism bears an inbuilt logic of universalization. It has developed into a global dimension within which non-Western cultures and traditions can come to terms with it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate this Western humanism from the issue of cultural identity by simply following its universalistic approach to humankind. But – and this is a crucial qualification – the idea of human dignity could be accepted outside the West and applied to or mediated with non-Western ideas of mankind and humanity. By doing so, humanism would get the cultural colour of non-Western traditions.

In the postcolonial turn, humanist ideas were loaded with the power of cultural identity won by struggles against Western supremacy. Here Western humanism was confronted with its own antithesis expedited through colonialism. As a response to the logic of coloniality, colonized societies responded by displacing Western humanism with what is considered as an authentic non-Western understanding of humanism. Here, non-Western (African, Indian, Chinese etc.) forms of identity were presented as an authentic bastion of subjectivity in opposition to the Western notion of humanism. A good example of such cases is

found in the first African countries after independence. Humanism was conceptualized by the new African elites as the essence of their non-Western identity called "negritude", "Ujhamaa", "Black Consciousness", "Ubuntu" or even "Humanism".² The emerging reaction from non-Western cultures nevertheless, also constitutes a diversification in which humanistic elements were identified in one's own traditions and applied to the topical intercultural communication. Such case is evident in the long-lasting and identity-forming tradition of Confucianism in East Asia. Based on the fundamental value of "ren" (benevolence), Confucianism can be understood as a tradition of humanism with its own cultural peculiarity.³

The globalization process of today with its challenge for non-ethnocentric new forms and rules of intercultural communication can be understood as a new axial time where all the traditional concepts of humanity and humaneness can turn their exclusive universalisms into inclusive ones. This could be the starting point for a new really global humanism.⁴ This new and really universalistic humanism needs interculturally valid rules for intercultural communication and especially in dealing with cultural difference and identity. These rules can be justified by referring to be basic quality ascribed to every human being by humanism: dignity, as being an end in itself and not only a means for the purpose of others.

In this special issue of TJEAS, our intention is to initiate and bring forward debates on humankind and humanity among scholars and representatives of various cultural and religious backgrounds. With these debates, we endeavor to

2 See also Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010); idem: *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010).

3 See Jörn Rüsen and Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Being Human: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalizations, vol. 1) (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009); Carmen Meinert (ed.), *Traces of Humanism in China: Tradition and Modernity* (Being Humamn: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalization, vol. 6) (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010).

4 See Jörn Rüsen and Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Being Human: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalizations, vol. 1) (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009).

analyze concepts and ideas of humanism in different cultures; recognizing their particularity and diversity in a historical perspective; and at the same time, looking in a comparative historical perspective for elements of a comprehensive concept of human dignity. Non-Western humanistic thought will be historically and systematically related to the Western humanistic tradition. The collections aims at contributing to a culture of mutual recognition of cultural differences based on shared norms of dialogue. By relating to basic understandings of the "nature" of humankind, we hope to emphasize its cultural value as a fundamental rule for intercultural communication.

These collections were previously delivered in a panel discussion at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam in 2010, prepared and directed by Jörn Rüsen. This panel is one of the outcomes of the project on "Humanism in the Era of Globalization – An Intercultural Dialogue on Humanity, Culture, and Values," which took place at the Institute for advanced study in the humanities in Essen from 2006 till 2009. This project was conceptualized as an answer to the challenge for new ideas of overcoming ethnocentric tendencies in the topical intercultural communication on cultural identity. As a starting point, the project communicated the simple fact that besides all differences, all cultures and civilizations in the world share the common nature and status of human beings. Accordingly, humankind has to be conceptualized as a common framework in the cultural processes of identity formation. At the same time cultural difference is a basic fact in human life as well. Without difference no identity.

The main purpose of the project was to mediate between both dimensions: the universalistic one of shared principles of being a human being and the particularistic one of different traditions and worldviews in thematizing the cultural nature of human beings. The result of this mediation should be a new humanism, which can be shared by all cultures since it integrates cultural difference into the idea of a fundamental cultural equality of humankind, expressed by the idea of human dignity. Such humanism is a vision of the future.

Its opportunity of coming into existence depends on the possibility of making it historically plausible. Historical possibility means to show that in most, if not all cultural traditions, we can find elements or a potential of humane ideas and principles. They appear in various forms and states of development. If this variety in time and space can be brought into a perspective of a growing unity of humankind, not homogenous, but by its cultural diversity, history can become an argument in favour of this new humanism.⁵

The collection of essays in this journal does not represent a comprehensive image of this development in humanism, its achievements and failures; its triumphs and defeats. What it can demonstrate is a constellation of fragments. But fragments do not deny the totality of a historical image and concept of humankind. On the contrary, fragments represent this totality under the condition of differing contexts, and it is on us to contribute to the idea of a new humanism in intercultural dimension by the fragments of our traditions and worldviews. Such new humanism should be inspired by the historical experience of other peoples and cultures as we present our historical experience in such a way that the unity of mankind becomes visible in the specific visions of our humanism. Our panel cannot cover the variety of humanisms in history. But it may indicate this variety by giving Africa, India, Latin America and the West a voice in the many voices of the choir of humanity.

The collection starts with the section of Hubert Cancik's "Light, Truth, Education: History in European Humanism." Cancik takes us back to the historical context and evolution of the European humanist tradition. History is a witness that brings forth light and truth through education. Where education is tied to humanism, history is constitutively humanistic in structure. Contemporary European humanist tradition is grounded on the awareness of historical distance and cultural difference. Drawing insights from the philological aspects of

⁵ We also acknowledge that such an argument can and should be used on the historical experience of inhumanity as well.

European intellectual tradition, Cancik concludes that history as key feature of education and understanding of the human person is a necessary point of departure for emergent discourses on humanism. There is, "in the structure of historical consciousness, a pre-condition for the genesis of humanism." (Cancik xiii)

Oliver Kozlarek in "The Humanist Turn in the Social and Cultural Sciences and the Commitment to Criticism" offers a historical survey of humanistic movements and the context of their social emergence as a response to social crises. But humanism does not need to have a fixed definition. Precisely because humanism (in history) emerged as a reaction to emergent social crises entails that our contemporary understanding of humanism does not necessarily mean a "return" to the traditional orientations and orthodox forms of humanism. The appeal for a *humanistic turn* is neither a claim nor a contemplation to revitalize the "old" traditionalist views on humanism. Rather, we should oblige ourselves to an intercultural paradigm through which we encounter and dialogue with other "diverse humanist traditions" as found in different cultures and civilizations. Through dialogue, we are able to recognize that despite our differences, we share universal values, which transcends all our differences – a recognition that opens unlimited spaces for intercultural dialogue.

In his "Two Cheers for Humanism," Sanjay Seth offers a postcolonial critique of humanism as a historical precedent to colonialism. This idea of humanism embodied in Eurocentric model of universal reason is as the foundation of colonial exploitation. This peculiar understanding of humanism is severely problematic because of this imposition of reason as basic prerequisite for human dignity. The European model of humanism should be abandoned because it not only excludes non-Europeans, but constitutively racist. He proposes an alternative model for humanism, which is both anthropological and non-Eurocentric. This new humanism he argues, is not based on any singular or homogenous rationality, but to be determined by a process of interculturality in

which different traditions of reasoning are recognized, respected and acknowledged: "I conclude by suggesting that a reinterpreted and viable humanism, will be one in which our moral intuitions regarding human commonality and dignity no longer rest upon a questionable anthropocentrism or on dubious claims to a universal Reason [...] such a reinterpretation will be the product of a dialogue between different civilizations and moral perspectives, rather than a declaration that one moral perspective (that of the modern West) is the correct one." (Seth xviii-xix)

The African experience comes from Michael Onyebuchi Eze's "Humanism as history in Contemporary Africa." He traces the genealogy of African historiography as a response to colonial historicity. Colonial historicity thrived through a denial of history to Africans. A denial of history he argues, yields to three damning normative consequences for the African subject: viz (i) a denial of history freezes the African subject as a child of the moment; (ii) a denial of history is a denial of African cultures and traditions; a denial of history places restriction to the *noumenal* development of the African subject, that is, potentiality of *becoming or achieving full humanity*. Contemporary African historiography would emerge as a response to challenging colonial historicity at its intellectual root. Since colonialism thrived in Africa through a denial of history to Africans, the African intellectual would have to rehabilitate his history as independent of colonial permutations. In this case, history becomes a history of humanism. The attempt to humanize African historiography is an attempt to restore the truncated image of the African subject. Nevertheless, as Eze argues, the problem with this kind of historiography is that even if it is a platform for subjective rehabilitation of the African subject, it is a method that reduces history to a string of metaphors. Yet, history is beyond metaphors. In criticizing the reductionism attached to the understanding of humanism as history, he proposes a new understanding of humanism as tied to culture. Where our vision of what constitutes a human person might bear incidental differences, our vision of a shared humanity, a good

that we all ascribe to is something we can learn from each other. This is the point of relevance in which humanism becomes a cultural practice.

Writing from the Indian historical experience, "Contemporary Challenges to Historical Studies: In search of humanistic History in An Era of Global Crisis," Umesh Chattopadhyaya argues that there is a possibility of a humanistic history; a new historicism that accommodates both interculturality and difference. A key element in this new historical thinking is a necessary "connection" between reason and compassion. Our theory of humanism must not only be grounded in rationality (typical of Western intellectual tradition), it ought to admit, an intellectual handmaid – so to speak – an element of compassion. Even more instructive is that we should incorporate emotive issues such as trauma and suffering into historical studies. Chattopadhyaya does not however, dismiss the virtue of rationality as source of our dignity – in totality – he pleads rather for compassion as a moderating influence on abstract rationality as key to our theory of humanism. Drawing insights from the Indian context, he proposes a four-fold logical systems as an alternative to the Western rationalist paradigm in dealing with historical problems.

Ilse Lenz's article "Humanism in the Perspective of Gender Studies" challenges the dominant conceptualization of man enraptured upon the "hegemonial male citizen"; a codification that excludes both women and subordinate non-white men. This image of man in modernity as an epitome of "citizen" or "human being" is best understood (in order to be rejected) within two different constellation, viz.: national and global. The national constellation conferred the right of full citizen to the hegemonial homogenous group as representative of the men in the dominant national group. They were ones with rights and duties within the national and are as such recognized as humans whereas women and other non-European males are automatically excluded by virtue of non-recognition as citizens. The women, especially, are *a special kind of humans*, a special type. However, within the global constellation, the idea of "hegemonial male" is now

considered obsolete and our idea of humanism is challenged to find ways in which we can transcend this image of a homogenous subject and embrace new ways of thinking based on recognition of difference, equality, and dignity of all persons. Within the context of international constellation, Ilse discusses various ways in which gender studies and emerging feminist perspectives would not only open new spaces for dialogues, but also enrich our understanding of an inclusive humanism. Human dignity is not dependent on "sameness", i.e., to become hegemonial men; it is dependent on equality and difference – but not sameness.



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