

Feature Article 【專題論文】

Two Cheers for Humanism 人文精神的兩項優勢

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Abstract

One of the most common justifications for colonial rule was the claim that liberty, equality, the dignity and rights of man, and institutions that were premised on these values and functioned to enshrine them- more generally, many of the values we associate with humanism, loosely defined- were to be the gift of the coloniser to the colonised. Anti-colonial movements in India and elsewhere invariably pointed out that in fact colonial rule rested upon the systematic violation of humanism; in doing so, they implicitly or explicitly accepted humanist values, arguing that only with an end to colonial rule would it be possible for these to be consistently applied. Briefly tracing these arguments, this paper goes on to consider a more "radical" position, one to be found in the writings of some Francophone anti-colonial thinkers. Fanon, Cesaire and others suggested, not just that Europe had not lived up to its humanism, or even that its humanism was necessarily and inescapably compromised by colonialism, but rather that exclusion of the "native" was constitutive of European humanism; that it was not accidentally and remedially racist, but inherently and constitutively so. Evaluating this argument, this paper concludes by asking what value, if any, humanism has today.

摘要

為殖民統治辯解最常見的說法之一便是聲稱自由、平等、人的尊嚴和權利，以及建基於這些價值且其功能在奉守這些價值的制度——更廣泛而言，許多我們會與人文精神聯想的價值，在鬆散的定義上——都是殖民者給予被殖民者的禮物。印度及其他地區的反殖民運動不變地指出：事實上殖民統治建立在有系統的侵害人文精神之上；在如上的行動中，這些運動含蓄地或明白地接受了人文精神的價值，主張唯有終止殖民統治才可能持續實踐人文精神的價值。本文簡要回顧這些論點，並繼續思考一個，出現在某些說法語的反殖民思想家著作中的，更加「激進」的立場。法農、塞澤爾和其他人提出：不僅歐洲不曾遵循其人文精神，甚或其人文精神已必要且不可避免地與殖民主義妥協，而且排斥「在地人」是歐洲人文精神的組成成分；它並非偶然的和可治療的種族主義者，而是在本質上和組成上即是如此。本文對此論點加以評價，並以提出人文精神，如果有的話，在今日的價值為何的疑問結尾。

Among the many justifications for colonial conquest and rule, one of the most important was the claim that European values and institutions were superior to those of conquered peoples, and that colonial rule functioned to transplant these values and institutions, to the benefit of the colonised. Liberty, equality, the dignity and rights of man, and institutions that were premised on these values and functioned to enshrine them – more generally, many of the values we associate with humanism, loosely defined – were to be the gift of the coloniser to the colonised. These ideals were avidly embraced by some of the elites of colonized societies, and especially by those elites who were products of the colonial encounter, educated in newly established schools and universities, and/or employed as junior functionaries in the colonial administration. Many accepted the idea that they needed to be "civilized" (the preferred term in India was "regenerated"). However, these elites were also well aware that these ideals, the supposed "gift" of Europe, were systematically violated in the colonies, and denied to the colonized peoples. It thus became a standard move amongst emergent nationalist movements to draw attention to the yawning gap between the Europe's self image and the reality of its rule in the colonies; between Europe's protestations, and its actions. This opened the space to invoke European values against colonial rule, and to demand that Europe live up to its professed ideals. Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty and un-British Rule in India* thus accused the British of governing India in fashion that was un-British and that violated their own principles, and urged that "a truly British course can and will certainly be vastly beneficent to both Britain and India."¹

Soon, a more contestatory position emerged within the ranks of nationalists. This did not appeal to the colonizer to live up to his principles, because it characterised colonial rule as a relation in which it was structurally impossible for him to do so. Liberty, equality, democracy and economic development were incompatible with colonial domination; far from being the mechanism for their

1 Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901), p. v.

transplantation, colonial rule was the prime obstacle to their flourishing. Jawaharlal Nehru would argue, as did many others, that the British rule of India retarded, rather than advanced economic, social and intellectual modernity in India.²

There was a third position which seemed to suggest that colonial rule was not so much a betrayal of humanist values, nor even that these values could only be fulfilled through the overthrow of colonial rule, but that colonialism was in fact the logical corollary of a humanism that was always tainted, always corrupt. This position was articulated – not always clearly and consistently – by some of the radical nationalists of Francophone Africa. "At the very time when it most often mouths the word," wrote Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism*: "the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism."³ What the West in fact lived by was a "pseudo-humanism", one that operated with notions of human dignity and rights that were "narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist."⁴ Frantz Fanon, addressing the people of Algeria, as well as other colonized peoples, wrote: "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them [...] in all the corners of the globe";⁵ Europe's much-vaunted humanism, Fanon tells his compatriots, consists in fact of "a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders."⁶ And he announces that as the "wretched of the earth" rise in revolt, "the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up."⁷

In his remarkable "Preface" to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Sartre wrote that European humanism has been "nothing but an ideology of lies,

2 See Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004).

3 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on colonialism*, translated by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 56.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

5 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 311.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 312.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

a perfect justification of pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions."⁸ "With us", writes Sartre – and the "us" in question is Europe, for Sartre is addressing his fellow Frenchmen and fellow Europeans, just as Fanon addresses himself to his people – "there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters."⁹

Though not fully worked out nor clearly and unambiguously expressed, implicit in some of the above quoted passages is a position very different from the two that I have parsed above. What is being suggested is not just that Europe has not lived up to its humanism, or even that its humanism is necessarily and inescapably compromised by colonialism, but rather that Europe's humanism did not simply "fail" to include non-Europeans, but that such exclusion was constitutive of this humanism; that it was not accidentally and remedially racist, but inherently and constitutively so. This anticipates a form, or formal structure, of argument that has, in recent times, become very familiar. If earlier generations of feminists argued that the "Man" of humanism and liberalism must be rethought so that it includes women as well as men, many contemporary feminists have argued by contrast that it was no mere accident, oversight or prejudice that identified Man with men, but rather that humanism and liberalism were premised upon the exclusion of women. Carole Pateman and others have argued that the individual exalted by liberalism is inherently a masculine figure, constituted in opposition to those traits that are seen as accompanying, and defining, of the feminine.¹⁰ Thus it is not sufficient, indeed not even possible, to "extend" the principles of liberty and equality enunciated by liberalism to include women, for these principles are constituted through the exclusion of women. Queer theorists have similarly argued that the normalization of heterosexuality is made possible by, and requires, the pathologization of homosexuality, and thus

8 Ibid., p. 25.

9 Ibid., p. 26.

10 See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

that ethical and political opposition to homophobia should not principally take the form of insisting that homosexual sex is "also" normal, but rather in rethinking categories like "normal", "natural", and "sex" itself;¹¹ and so on. In all these cases, the conclusion drawn is that it is not possible to "extend" or "enlarge" the principles or ideals in question in order to achieve justice, but that these principles and ideals are suspect, and have to be radically rethought, if not altogether abandoned.

Building upon the intimations of Césaire, Fanon and Sartre, in this essay I enquire into whether the same argument applies to humanism. Have the failings of humanism been principally those of incompleteness (ie, failure to realise that humanism must include all humans, and not merely Europeans) and/or "implementation" (ie, colonialism led to the corruption of a doctrine that can, however, be retrieved)? Or, is humanism irrecoverable, such that all attempts to "extend" it, to make it more "inclusive" or to fulfil its hitherto unrealised potential, are misplaced and destined to fail?

In order to be able to address this question, some clarifications are necessary. I take humanism to signify something much broader than the intellectual and cultural current that made the *studia humanitatis* central to the pedagogy of the Renaissance. But I also treat humanism as something narrower – or at any rate, more specific – than the claim or intuition that all humans have something fundamental in common, and that this mandates equal entitlement to dignity and respect. The identification of the latter with humanism is, I think, the principal reason why few are willing to abandon and denounce humanism (certainly not Sartre or Fanon or Césaire, who despite their coruscating remarks quoted above, were not willing to abandon it¹²). This is certainly a defining feature of

11 Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

12 Césaire, in declaring that Europe had not been "able to live a true humanism," implied that such a humanism was available – "a humanism made to the measure of the world" – *Discourse on colonialism*, p. 56. And Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* ends with the following exhortation: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must

humanism, but it does not serve to distinguish it from other doctrines and understandings, including religious ones, which treat all humans as sharing a commonality (an immortal soul, etc) which commands respect. What historically distinguished humanism from the many other affirmations of human dignity and worth was the specific form that this affirmation took; in particular, two supporting or buttressing arguments which, in affirming human equality and dignity, give this affirmation its distinctively "humanist" cast. These are – I mention them briefly here, and expand upon them in the next section of this essay – first, that human worth is affirmed independently of god(s), and more generally, that "man" replaces god as the measure of all things. Second, that for humanism what all humans have in common at once consists of, resides in, and can only be discovered through, a singular rationality.

Thus understood, humanism is not simply a Renaissance phenomenon, but something that comes to full flower in the Enlightenment, in the form of the idea of a universal humanity and a singular Reason; and while the affirmation of a common humanity and of human worth is central to it, it is not sufficient to define it or distinguish it from the other such affirmations. That is why I remain sceptical regarding claims that purport to show that humanism flourished in pre-modern India, China or elsewhere – not because I doubt that these and many other cultures have valued humans and affirmed their commonalities, but because that alone does not serve to define humanism. In this essay, rather than assume that humanism is a good, and seek to validate the honour of non-Western cultures and traditions by showing that they too possessed it, I ask whether the affirmation of human commonality and worth is best secured by an anthropological understanding of the world, and by the search for a singular rationality. In short,

try out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man-" p. 316. More recently, Edward Said affirmed his conviction "that it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and Empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism [...]" (See Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2004], pp. 10-11)

is the aspiration to affirm human commonality and dignity best served by humanism?

Anthropology

Edward Said declares that the "core" of humanism "is the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women, and not by God, and that it can be understood rationally according to the principle formulated by Vico in the *New Science*, that we can really only know what we make [...]"¹³ At the core of humanism, then, is a philosophical anthropology – "that philosophical interpretation of man," in Martin Heidegger's words, "which explains and evaluates whatever is [...] from the standpoint of man and in relation to man."¹⁴ The centrality accorded to man requires, of course, a diminution (though not necessarily an elimination) of the role accorded to god(s). Once, to understand men you had to understand God; now, to understand the gods of men you have to understand the men, for their gods are the fantastical creation of their minds. Once the purposes and the acts of gods explained the world of men; with humanism, gods are themselves signs of men, traces from which historians, anthropologists and sociologists can recreate the meanings and purposes with which these men endowed their world.

Understood thus, humanism is a defining feature of modern Western culture. Thinkers of diverse philosophical affiliations, working from within different disciplines – Vico, Herder, Tylor, Cassirer, Geertz, Dilthey, Greenblatt and the "New Historicism", and numerous others – testify that behind most things lurks Man; that art and literature, religion and morality and myth, law and custom, and common sense are all "products", "expressions" or "traces" of "societies" or

¹³ Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), p. 133.

"peoples" or "cultures". Max Weber characterised this as the enabling presumption of the human sciences: "The transcendental presupposition of every cultural science [...] is that we are cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance."¹⁵

If the centrality accorded to Man as maker of meanings and purposes involves a diminution of the role once accorded to god(s), it also involves a separation, a distinction, between a human world and a non-human one. If we return to the definition of humanism offered by Said, we will note that he equates humanism with the recognition that "the historical world" is made by men and women, implying that there is another world- the world of nature – which can be transformed and humanised, but which nonetheless exists independently of man. Thus there are in fact two worlds, one of impersonal processes and laws, the other of human intentions and meanings. Nature is not a realm of purposes and meanings, and so to gain knowledge of nature is to gain understanding of the impersonal and often lawlike forces that shape it; knowledge of the historical or cultural world is knowledge of purposes and meanings, for the historical world is where the meanings and purposes of men are apparent in the traces they leave behind. Knowledge of nature, the preserve of the natural sciences, can lead to mastery of natural forces; knowledge of the historical world, the preserve of the human and humanist sciences, leads to self-knowledge.

The distinctions being made here between society and nature on the one hand, and the marginalisation of God as a factor of explanation on the other, are closely connected. Humanism replaces a view of a single world shot through with meaning and purpose, in which the purposes and designs of nature are prefigured and reflected in the social world, with two worlds, one devoid of

15 Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," in Edward Shils and Henry Finch (eds.), *The Methodology of the Social Sciences: Max Weber* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), p. 81. On the significance of this for how the human sciences cognise and construct the world, see Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

meaning and purpose, and the other constituted of the meanings and purposes humans have given their world in different times and places.

Most accounts of the emergence of humanist ideals are, as in the case of Said, highly appreciative, even laudatory. That the world is made by Man is usually presented as the "discovery" of a truth – a truth previously obscured, principally by the belief in God and the idea that the world was of His making, and thus largely beyond rational comprehension and reconstruction. Recognition that the social world is of human making is also the necessary precondition to further recognising that because the historical world is of human making, it can be remade, can be made differently. Humanism here appears as a liberation in thought that is a necessary condition for reconstructing the world; and the distinction it proposes between the cultural/historical world and the world of nature is similarly a precondition for a rational comprehension, and hence mastery, of nature.

There have always been critics of these presumptions, including early critics such as Hamann and Kierkegaard. In more recent times, Adorno and Horkheimer famously and influentially argued that an instrumentalised understanding of Reason, the related treatment of nature as something which exists in order to be subjected to calculation and domination, and the reduction of Man to a means rather than an end in himself, were all closely connected, as part of an unintended and tragic "dialectic of Enlightenment."¹⁶ Martin Heidegger has argued that the centrality accorded to Man by humanism entails a forgetting of Being that is the root of a technological conception of the world which reduces everything to a "standing reserve", and fails to "realise the proper dignity of man."¹⁷ And if in the non-Western world there were many who accepted and celebrated the values that were part of humanism, usually by identifying them with that which was

16 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).

17 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 233.

"modern", properly "scientific", and thus necessary for the project of forging an independent, modern, and in some cases even socialist, nation, there were also always those, like Gandhi, who were critics of a "civilization" that in purporting to exalt Man frequently degraded men – not least by failing to attend to that spiritual dimension which was part of what it meant to be human and yet transcended the merely human.

However it is the account of the birth of this philosophical anthropology delivered by those who are the progeny of it that has been dominant, and this account celebrates its ancestry. The above named and other critiques have thus either been dismissed as "irrationalism" or "mysticism", or at best, treated as "correctives" to the "excesses" of Enlightenment humanism. I wish to suggest that current circumstances have changed such that a critical reconsideration of this defining aspect of humanism is required. What has changed is, above all, an environmental crisis that calls into question the absolute privileging of humans, as well as the sharp distinction between man and nature, that are characteristic of humanism. It is not only and obviously that our privileging of man may have something to do with the despoliation of the conditions that make human life sustainable, but also that the very distinction between the world that men make and the world that exists independently of them is in the process of collapsing. With global warming and the mass extinction of species, humans have become geological, and not (as before) simply biological agents: "Humans have become geological agents very recently in human history. In that sense, we can say that it is only very recently that the distinction between human and natural histories [...] has begun to collapse. For it is no longer a question simply of man having an interactive relation with nature. This humans have always had, or at least that is how man has been imagined in a large part of what is generally called the Western tradition. Now [...] humans are a force of nature in the geological sense.

A fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought has come undone in this crisis."¹⁸

Reason

If anthropology (and a consequent division between nature and society) is one defining element of humanism, the conviction that what all humans have in common resides in, and can only be discovered, through a singular rationality, is another. The project to establish this was at the heart of the Enlightenment.

In his "Was ist Aufklärung" Kant famously defined Enlightenment as mankind coming to maturity through the exercise of its reason. But if the pre-modern notion of a morally ordered and purposive universe had been, in Weber's later phrase, "disenchanted"; if tradition and custom no longer seemed the source of Reason, or indeed, even reasonable; and if Hume's sceptical challenge raised the possibility of as many reasons as there are persons (and indeed, then proceeded to undermine the very notion of a unified self); then what Reason was this, and whose Reason? If Reason was not out there in the world, then it must be in the mind; but since there were many minds, and what people considered reasonable varied from person to person, period to period, and culture to culture, what was needed was a discovery and defense of reason that avoided solipsism, perspectivism and relativism. The task the Enlightenment set itself, in Alasdair MacIntyre's words, was to find and define principles of rational justification "independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places."¹⁹

18 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry*, 35 (2009), p. 207.

19 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 6.

The most powerful and enduring solution to this puzzle was offered by Kant. Its power lay, above all else, in the argument Kant called "transcendental". Instead of "dogmatically" asserting certain propositions to be true, or seeking to identify, on empirical grounds, a set of rational principles common to all men – an exercise Kant recognised was always doomed to failure – Kant instead asked what sort of beings we had to be to have cognitions and perceptions in the first place. The transcendental question allowed Kant to deduce universal categories of Reason which were not derived from human experience, which is varied – in Kant's words, "universality [...] falls away if [its] basis is taken from the special constitution of human nature or from the accidental circumstances in which it is placed"²⁰ – but was the basis for our having any experience in the first place. The move came at a certain cost – the "things in themselves" had to be sacrificed, the transcendental deduction which purported to show that the world must in fact correspond to the categories through which we know it was never very convincing, and the whole architectonic was formalist to the nth degree – but it was nonetheless extraordinarily powerful. Anyone who manages to work their way through the teeth-gnashing prose of the three critiques cannot fail to be in awe of the intellectual achievement contained therein. Amongst other things, Kant managed to make a powerful argument for a Reason that was universal, because notwithstanding the immense variety of human experience, moralities and notions of beauty, it was the precondition for humans having any sort of experience, morality or conception of beauty. Kant's was the most powerful answer to the Enlightenment search for rational principles "independent of all those social and cultural particularities which [...] [are] the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places." Modern knowledge, as elaborated and defended by Kant and the Enlightenment more generally, could now stake a claim to having validated or proven itself, thus revealing all earlier knowledges to have been speculation or dogma. And of course this singular reason proved

20 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by H. J. Paton (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 109.

that all humans, irrespective of the differences among them, were to be treated as ends and not means.

It is testimony to the vitality of the line of argument initiated by Kant that the most sophisticated contemporary attempts to salvage or retrieve the Enlightenment project- while acknowledging, as they must, that Reason is of this world, is impure, and thus inseparably bound with interests, culture and power- all do so by returning to Kant. It is usually a Kant stripped of much of the metaphysics, but some version or other of a transcendental argument is at the heart of all such attempts. The discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel, Hilary Putnam's internal realism, and John Rawls's earlier versions of his theory of justice are all contemporary examples of theories that draw upon Kant to argue that, notwithstanding cultural and other diversity, transsubjective and transcultural standards of rational justification and of knowledge are still possible.

The criticism that can be levelled at such arguments, unsurprisingly, is similar to the criticism that was levelled at Kant by his contemporaries and immediate successors, namely that such proofs presuppose what needs to be proven. The example of the political philosopher John Rawls is especially instructive. In his *A Theory of Justice* and some subsequent works Rawls sought to draw upon Kant to develop a theory of justice that would be grounded upon a few rationally defensible principles that would be acknowledged by almost all. In later works, he acknowledges that his theory of justice, and his defence of liberalism, already presuppose a certain kind of public political culture, one shaped by the Wars of Religion in Europe, by the separation of politics from religion thereafter, and so on. The aim of his later theory is thus no longer to elaborate a quasi-transcendental defence of liberal justice, but rather a pragmatic and procedural defense of a justice which is acknowledged to be Western and liberal.²¹ Thus Rawls comes to concede – as Apel, for instance, does not – that

²¹ See John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14, 3 (Summer, 1985), pp. 223-251; *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia

what we have learned to call Reason (or justice, which is Reason in the domain of morality) is in fact the product of a specific history and intellectual tradition, and cannot, in fact, be passed off as "universal".

That which Rawls comes to "concede" has been levelled as an accusation by others, who have charged that Reason always turns out to be, not a placeless universal, but European. What we have learned to call Reason is not rationality as such, but a historically and culturally specific way of constructing and construing the world. Moreover, treating this tradition as universal has been an essential part of the story of, and justification for, colonialism. Armed with the certainty that it possessed nothing less than universal Reason, Europe could proceed with its colonial conquests, no longer principally in the name of bringing the true word of god to the heathen, but rather in the name of bringing Enlightenment and civilization to the benighted. What were being encountered were not other traditions of reasoning and other ways of being in the world, but unreason. Europe had a justification for conquering and ruling; indeed, it had a responsibility to do so. The institutions and practices that constituted colonialism, or came in its wake, were now seen to be educating the colonized, so that they too might one day reach their maturity and be able to participate in and exercise the Reason that was to be Europe's gift to them.

Lest there be any confusion, let me clarify that I am not suggesting that the intellectual and cultural tradition of modern Europe was the only one to think that it was right and all others wrong, or the only one that has sought to impose its vision on others. Neither the modern age nor Europe has had a monopoly on arrogance or dogmatism. What I *am* suggesting is that the Enlightenment heritage – the European conviction in a context and tradition free Reason – made it possible for Europe to conquer and rule not in the name of a tradition that claimed to be superior to all others, but in the name of something that did not see

itself as a tradition at all. This was a knowledge which claimed not only to be true, but declared itself to be deduced from nothing less than reason itself, rather than being grounded in the ideals and practices of real historical communities. This was a source of great self-confidence; and of enormous arrogance and condescension. And of course that intellectual moment coincided – perhaps more than coincidentally – with a historical moment when Europe, and only Europe, had the means to impose its will upon the world.

At any rate, I would suggest that it is now all too clear that what humans have in common, and what may allow us to "ground" their claims to dignity and respect, neither resides in nor can be discovered by a singular Reason. All attempts to do so have ended up, whether wittingly or unwittingly, by substituting "European" or "Western" for "human". The idea of a singular Reason, although deeply rooted in our culture and in our thought, cannot be sustained, and needs to be critically re-examined.

Whither Humanism?

I began this essay by observing that "actually existing" humanism, like actually existing socialism, has been a failure, and proceeded to enquire into the nature of this failure – whether this lay in a failure to extend the principles of humanism to all humans, for reasons that may have been historically contingent and therefore remediable; or whether the failure was more deep-rooted, because humanism was constituted such that recognising some as men required, in Sartre's words quoted earlier, "creating slaves and monsters" of other men. This question is of more than intellectual interest, for depending upon our answer to it, humanism will either guide our attempts to build a more just world, or be seen as a legacy that has to be overcome in pursuit of such attempts. In order to pursue this question, I suggested that humanism consists of an affirmation that all

humans, notwithstanding their many differences, have something important in common, and that this "something" requires that all humans be equally accorded respect and dignity; and that this rests upon two supporting arguments/presumptions. One of these is a philosophical anthropology, which makes the "discovery" that men are the source of meanings and values, not gods, and discovers also a domain of nature that is devoid of meaning and purpose, an inert object subject to human knowledge and manipulation. The second is the presumption that the counterpart of a common humanity is a singular reason. I have argued that neither of these arguments or presumptions can be sustained; they were never true, and are more demonstrably untrue today than ever before. The centrality accorded to man, who as creator of all values and meanings is accorded a transcendental status akin to those gods he replaced, and the instrumentalisation of nature, are not "truths" finally discovered, but are rather a particular way of construing and constructing the world. As such, they have been the source of many human achievements; but they have also entailed great costs, costs which are especially apparent today, as the exaltation of man despoils that which is the very condition for *any* sort of human life, and as the distinction between the human and the natural collapses. And that which all humans have in common neither resides in, nor is to be discovered through, the search for a singular Reason that abstracts from the differences that characterize humankind.

The affirmation of human commonality and dignity is something that is no less urgent today than at any time before. Because such an affirmation can plausibly be seen as being, in some sense, at the core of humanism, we cannot reject humanism, but rather need to re-found and to reinterpret it. 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. I further suggest that 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.♦

♦ Responsible editor: Hsiu-wen Huang (黃秀文).

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