

**What Do We Understand Universalist Humanism to Mean Today?  
Community Emanu-El Headquarters of Liberal Judaism in Argentina, Buenos Aires  
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I wish to express my thanks to the Emanu-El community and to Rabbi Sergio Bergman for the invitation to speak here today. I would also like to thank those who are here today, the members of the community, the other speakers in this series, and also the friends of humanism who are present.

The title of this talk affirms the existence of a universal humanism, but, of course, this affirmation needs to be proven. To do that, we will first have to examine what we understand by the word "humanism," given that there is no general consensus on the meaning of this word. Second, we will have to discuss whether humanism belongs to a single region or place, a single culture, or whether instead it lies at the roots and is the heritage of all humanity. But before beginning, we should make explicit our interest with regard to these issues, since if we failed to do so it might be thought that we were motivated simply by historical curiosity or by some desire to pursue cultural trivia. For us, humanism has the compelling merit of being not only history but also the project of a future world and a tool of action for today.

We seek a humanism that contributes to the improvement of life, that makes common cause with those who stand up against discrimination, fanaticism, exploitation, and violence. In a world that is rapidly globalizing-and throwing diverse peoples together as it shrinks ever smaller-we see growing symptoms of the resulting clash between cultures, ethnic groups, and regions. Such a world needs a universalist humanism-a humanism that is both plural and convergent, diverse and unifying. A world in which countries, institutions, and human relationships are becoming destructured must have a humanism capable of impelling a rebuilding of social forces. A world in which the meaning and direction of life have been lost needs a humanism capable of creating a new atmosphere of reflection, in which the personal is no longer unrelentingly at odds with the social, nor the social with the personal. We seek a humanism that is creative, not repetitive-a new humanism that will encompass the paradoxes of the age while aspiring to resolve them. These ideas, in some cases apparently contradictory, will emerge in more detail as I go on.

In asking "What do we understand by humanism today?" I want to address both the origins of humanism as well as its current state. Let's start with humanism as it is historically recognized in the West, while leaving the door open to what has taken place in other parts of the world where a humanist attitude was present well before the coining of such words as "humanism," "humanist," and similar terms. That humanist attitude, which is a position common to humanists of all cultures, has the following characteristics: (1) placing the human being as the central value and concern; (2) affirming the equality of all human beings; (3) recognizing personal and cultural diversity; (4) tending to develop new knowledge beyond what is accepted as absolute truth; (5) affirming the freedom of ideas and beliefs; and (6) repudiating violence.

As we look more deeply into European culture, particularly that of pre-Renaissance Italy, we note that the phrase *studia humanitatis* (the study of the humanities) referred to a knowledge of Greek and Latin, with special emphasis on the "classical" authors. The "humanities" were comprised of history, poetry, rhetoric, grammar, literature, and moral philosophy. These disciplines dealt with generically human questions, in contrast to the subjects studied by "jurists," "canonists," "legists," and "artists," which were meant as specifically professional training. Of course, elements from the humanities formed part of the subject matter in these fields, but were aimed more at practical applications appropriate to their respective occupations. As time went on, the difference between the "humanists" and the "professionals" grew more pronounced, as the former stressed classical studies, the investigation of other cultures, and an interest in things human-in everything that had to do with the human being. This tendency continued to such a degree that it finally made inroads into fields quite distant from those that up until that point had been considered the "humanities," leading eventually to the great cultural revolution of the Renaissance.

In fact, the humanist attitude had begun to develop long before this, and we can see signs of this in the themes sounded by the Goliard poets and the *êcoles* of the French cathedrals in the twelfth century. But the Italian word *humanista*, which designated a certain type of scholar, did not come into use until 1538. On this point I refer you to an article by Augusto Campana titled "The Origin of the Word 'Humanist,'" published in 1946. My point is simply that the first humanists would not have recognized themselves by that name, which came into being only much later. And here, according to studies of Walter Rüegg, one would also have to include such related words as *humanistische* (humanistic), which began to be used in 1784, and *humanismus* (humanism), which began to spread with the work of Niethammer in 1808. It was not until about the middle of the nineteenth century, in fact, that the word "humanism" began to form a part of almost every European language. We are speaking, then, about recent words and recent interpretations of phenomena that were no doubt experienced very differently at the time from the ways they have been interpreted by historiography and the cultural histories of the nineteenth century. This point is not, in my view, trivial, and I would like to come back to it again in a few moments when we consider the traditional meanings of the word "humanism."

If I may be permitted a digression, I might point out that at present we still find that same historical substratum and still encounter those differences between the studies in the humanities that are imparted in

institutions and colleges and the simple attitude that people may exhibit, defined not by their particular profession or academic specialty but rather by their stance with respect to the human being as the central concern. When people define themselves as humanists today, they tend not to do so on the basis of their studies-in much the same way as students or scholars in the humanities do not necessarily consider themselves humanists. The humanist attitude is vaguely understood as something broader, almost all-encompassing, and generally extending beyond the confines of academic specialties.

In Western academe, the term "humanism" often refers to that process of transformation of culture that began in Italy, particularly in Florence, at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and which, with the Renaissance, expanded throughout Europe. This current was initially linked to the *humanae litterae* (those texts that dealt with "human matters"), in contradistinction to the *divinae litterae* (those texts that stressed things divine). And that is one of the reasons that its students and scholars were called "humanists." From this standpoint, humanism is, in its origins, a literary phenomenon, with a clear mission to recover the contributions of Greek and Latin culture, which had been suffocated for ten centuries by medieval Christianity. We should note that the sudden eruption of this phenomenon was not due solely to an endogenous change in economic, social, and political factors in Western society, but also to the fact that this society was receiving transformative influences from other regions and cultures. Intense contact with the Jewish and Muslim cultures, a broadening of geographical horizons-all these formed part of a context that fostered a concern with that which is generically human (rather than narrowly Italian or even European) and with discoveries of "things human."

I believe that Salvatore Puledda is correct when, in his book *On Being Human: Interpretations of Humanism from the Renaissance to the Present*, he explains that the medieval, pre-humanist world of Europe was, from the temporal and physical points of view, a closed environment that tended to deny the importance of the contact that did in fact take place with other cultures. History, from the medieval point of view, was the history of sin and redemption. For this view, a knowledge of other cultures and civilizations that were not "illuminated by the grace of God" held no great interest. The future was simply a preparation for the Apocalypse and the judgment of God. In that Ptolemaic cosmogony, the Earth was the unmoving center of the Universe, surrounded by the spheres of the sun and the planets moving under the impulse of angelic hands, and beyond those, the sphere of the fixed stars. This system ended at the Empyrean, the throne of God, the Unmoved Mover of all. And the social organization of the Middle Ages corresponded to that vision: It was a hierarchical, hereditary structure that kept nobles rigidly separated from serfs. At the apex of this pyramid stood the Pope and the Emperor, sometimes allied, sometimes locked in struggle for hierarchical preeminence. The medieval economy, at least until the eleventh century, was a closed system based on the consumption of products at the place of their production. Money circulated only in the most limited way. Trade was slow and difficult. Europe was a continental power, cut off from much of the world because the sea lanes lay in the hands of the Byzantines and Arabs. But the journeys of Marco Polo and his contact with the cultures and technologies of the Far East; the centers of learning in Spain, from which Jewish, Arab, and Christian teachers spread new knowledge; the search for new trade routes that would avoid the barrier posed by the warring Byzantine and Muslim fleets; the formation of an increasingly active merchant class; the growth of a more powerful bourgeoisie; and the development of more efficient political institutions such as the Italian seignories-all these phenomena produced a profound change in the social atmosphere, and that change allowed the development of the humanist attitude. Nor should we forget that this development was marked by many advances and retreats, only after which it finally became a truly conscious attitude.

Just one century after Petrarch (1304–1374), knowledge of the classics was ten times greater than it had been throughout the entire intervening thousand years. Petrarch pored over the ancient codices for knowledge, trying to correct a distorted cultural memory, and in doing so he initiated a tendency toward reconstructing the past and brought forth a new perspective that recognized the flow of history-a perspective long blocked by the immobilism of the Middle Ages. Another of the early humanists, Gianozzo Manetti, in his 1452 work *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* ("On the Dignity of Man"), reaffirmed the worth of the human being against the attitude of *contemptu mundi*, contempt for the world, preached by the monk Lothar of Segni, later Pope Innocent III. In a subsequent work, *De voluptate* ("On Pleasure"), Lorenzo Valla attacked the ethical concept of pain that prevailed in his time. And so, as economic change took place and the social structures were transformed, humanists continued to make this process an increasingly conscious one, generating an avalanche of productions that further shaped and defined this current that was already extending beyond the ambit of "the cultural" and was soon to call into question the very structures of power of the age: the Church and the monarchy.

Many specialists have noted that a new image of the human being and personality had already appeared in pre-Renaissance humanism. This human personality or existence was constructed and expressed by means of action, and it is in this respect that special importance is given to the Will over speculative intelligence. In addition, there emerged a new attitude toward nature. Nature was no longer simply God's creation, a vale of tears for mortals, but rather the setting and environment for the human being and, in some cases, the seat and body of God. And lastly, this new stance vis-à-vis the physical universe supported and strengthened the study of the material world in its various aspects, and it led to explanations of that world in terms of a set of immanent forces that could be understood without recourse to theological concepts. This

shows that there was already a clear tendency toward experimentation and a drive to master natural laws. The world was now the “kingdom of man,” and the human being was to master it through a knowledge of the sciences.

It was within this general framework that nineteenth-century scholars gave the name “humanist” to more than just the many literary figures of the Renaissance. Side by side with figures like Nicholas of Cusa, Rudolph Agricola, Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus, Thomas More, Jacques Lefèvre, Charles de Bouelles, and Juan Vives were included others such as Galileo and Leonardo da Vinci.

It is well known that the influence of many of the themes and ideas first introduced by the humanists of the Renaissance continued down through the years, eventually inspiring the French encyclopédistes and the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. But after the French and American Revolutions there began a decline in which the humanist attitude sank out of sight once more. Critical idealism, absolute idealism, and Romanticism, which in turn inspired absolutist political philosophies, rejected the human being as the central value, converting humankind into an epiphenomenon of other powers. This object-ification, this “it” instead of “you” or “thou,” as Martin Buber astutely put it, became the reigning view of the human being throughout the planet. But the tragedies of the two world wars shook our societies to their very foundations, and there arose once more in the face of the Absurd a questioning of the meaning of human life. This can be seen clearly in the so-called “philosophies of existence.” I will return to the contemporary state of humanism toward the end of my talk, but for the moment I would like to point out several fundamental aspects of humanism, among which we find its opposition to all forms of discrimination and its tendency toward universality.

The theme of mutual tolerance and the resulting convergence to which it can lead is very dear to humanism, and so I would like to place before you once more the explanation given by Dr. Bauer in his talk on November 3:

In Muslim feudal society, and particularly in Spain, the situation of the Jews was quite distinct. There was no social marginalization worth mentioning, just as there was none to speak of for Christians. And only rarely did those tendencies that today we would call “fundamentalist” arise. The dominant religion did not identify itself with the prevailing social order to the same degree as in Christian Europe. Nor can one in any way use the term “ideological division” here, despite the fact that different religions, in parallel and with mutual tolerance, did exist. Everyone went, together, to the official schools and universities—a thing that would have been inconceivable in the Christian society of the Middle Ages. In his youth, the great Maimonides was a pupil and friend of Ibn-Rushd (known to the West as Averroës). And if later on the Jews, and Maimonides himself, suffered pressure and persecutions at the hands of the fanatics who had come from Africa and assumed power in Al-Andalus, these same fanatics did not spare the Arab philosopher, whom they considered equally heretical. During this time the atmosphere was such that a broad and deep humanism could and did arise on the part of both Muslims and Jews.... In Italy the situation was similar, not only under the brief empire of Islam in Sicily but afterward as well, and for a long time even under the direct rule of the Papacy. A monarch of German descent, the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, living in Sicily and himself a poet, even had the audacity to proclaim for his rule a tripartite ideological foundation: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and even, through this last, a continuity with classical Greek philosophy.

Here the quotation ends. There is no great difficulty in tracing humanism in the Jewish and Arab cultures. I will simply quote now some observations made by the Russian scholar Artur Sagadeev in a talk he gave in November 1993 in Moscow. In that talk, “Humanism in Classical Muslim Thought,” Sagadeev pointed out the following:

The infrastructure of humanism in the Muslim world was shaped by the development of the cities and the culture of the cities. If we look at the following figures, we can judge the degree of urbanization of that world: The three largest cities of Savad—that is, southern Mesopotamia—and the two largest cities of Egypt contained almost twenty percent of the population. On the basis of the percentage of the population living in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, we can see that in the eighth and ninth centuries Mesopotamia and Egypt surpassed even many nineteenth-century Western European countries—including the Low Countries, England, Wales, and France. According to careful calculations, Baghdad at this time had 400,000 inhabitants, and the population of cities such as Al Fustat (later Cairo), Córdoba, Alexandria, Al Kufa, and Basra ranged from 100,000 to 250,000.

The concentration in cities of great resources derived from trade and taxes brought about the emergence of a large class of medieval intelligentsia, a dynamism in spiritual life, and considerable accomplishment in science, literature, and art. The central focus in all of this was the human being, both as human race and as unique individual. It should be pointed out that the medieval Muslim world knew no cultural division such as that between the culture of the city and a culture opposed by its axiological orientation to the city’s inhabitants (an anti-urban culture represented in Europe by the inhabitants of the monasteries and feudal estates). In the Muslim world the bearers of theological education and the social groups that were analogous to the European feudal class lived in the cities and experienced the powerful influence of the culture formed among the wealthy urbanites of the Muslim cities.

As to the axiological orientation of the wealthy inhabitants of Muslim cities, we can judge it by the reference group they aspired to imitate, which was to be the embodiment of the qualities of a distinguished, well-educated figure. This reference group was made up of the Adibs, people of broad humanitarian

interests, knowledgeable, educated, and of high morals. The Adab—that is, the ensemble of qualities belonging to the Adib-entailed ideals of urbane, courtly, refined behavior and self-possession, and was an ideal that in its intellectual and moral function was synonymous with the Greek word *paideia* or the Latin word *humanitas*.

The Adibs thus embodied ideals of humanism and were at the same time proponents of humanistic ideas that sometimes took the form of carefully polished phrases such as “Man is the problem of man,” and “He who crosses our sea—for that man there is no shore that is not himself.” An insistence on the earthly destiny of the human being was characteristic of the Adibs, and it led them sometimes to a religious skepticism, even to the extent that some fashionable members of the group would flaunt their atheism.

Adab initially meant the etiquette of the Bedouins; but it took on its humanist character thanks to the fact that the Caliphate, for the first time since Alexander the Great, welcomed the existence of distinct religious groups and became a kind of crossroads between different cultural traditions. Thus, the Mediterranean was linked with the Indo-Iranian world. During the period in which medieval Muslim culture flourished, Adab involved the need to know ancient Hellenic philosophy, on the one hand, and to absorb the educational programs developed by Greek scientists, on the other. The Muslims used enormous resources to advance these proposals. Suffice it to say that, according to the calculations of specialists, in Córdoba alone there were more books than in all of Europe outside of Al-Andalus.

The transformation of the Caliphate into a center of reciprocal influences with other cultures in a mixture of various ethnic groups contributed to the formation of yet another feature of humanism: universalism—the idea of the unity of the human race. In reality, the formation of this idea was rooted in the fact that Muslim lands extended from the Volga River in the north to Madagascar in the south and from the Atlantic coast of Africa in the west to the Pacific coast of Asia in the east. Although with the passage of time the Muslim empire disintegrated, the small states that formed from the rubble were very much like the fragmented possessions of Alexander the Great’s successors. However, the Islamic faithful were still united by a single religion, a single common literary language, a single law, a single culture, while in their daily lives they communicated and lived with the cultural values of differing and very diverse religious groups.

The spirit of universalism reigned in scientific circles, in meetings (the *madjalis*) that drew together Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists who shared common intellectual interests and came from many corners of the Muslim world. They were united by the “ideology of friendship” that had previously united the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists, and other philosophical schools of antiquity, and later on the circle of Marsilio Ficino in the Italian Renaissance. On the theoretical plane, the principles of universalism had already been formulated within the framework of Kalam, and later became the basis of the conception of the world for both rationalist philosophers and the Sufi mystics. In the debates organized by the Mutakallimi theologians (the Teachers of Islam), in which representatives of many religions took part, it was the custom to support one’s thesis not with references to sacred texts, because these references had no basis for the representatives of other religions, but to ground it instead exclusively in human reason.

The text I have just read you from Sagadeev’s talk does not do full justice to the wealth of description he gives us of the customs, daily life, art, religious sensibility, law, and economic activity of the Muslim world during its period of humanist splendor. I would like to look now at another work, also by a Russian scholar, a specialist in the cultures of the New World. Professor Sergei Semenov, in his monograph of August, 1994, titled “Humanist Traditions and Innovations in the Spanish-American World,” takes a completely new approach to tracing the humanist attitude in the great cultures of pre-Columbian America. Here is what he says:

When we speak of humanist tendencies in the Spanish-American world, we can analyze them above all from the standpoint of the material left us in artistic productions, the work of the masses, and the work of the trades and professions, which we see not only embodied in the monuments of the culture but also engraved in the memory of the people. There are many possibilities for applying this interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the concrete manifestations of humanism in the Spanish-American world, which is pluralistic to a high degree, exemplifying the phenomenon of cultural synthesis that has occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, on four continents. Of course, the principles in the Spanish-American world are markedly different from the traditions of the Euro-Asiatic world, but in various peoples of the Spanish-American world they approached a universal recognition of the original underlying unity of all human beings, independent of the tribe or society to which they belonged.

We can see these notions of humanism in both Mesoamerica and South America in the pre-Columbian period. In Mesoamerica we find the myth of Quetzalcóatl, and in South America the legend of Viracocha—both deities who rejected human sacrifice, which was commonly practiced against prisoners of war who belonged to other tribes; such human sacrifice was prevalent in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest. But indigenous myths and legends, Spanish accounts, and material monuments of culture tell us that the cult of Quetzalcóatl, which appeared sometime between the years 800 and 900, is associated in the consciousness of the peoples of this region with a struggle against human sacrifice and the affirmation of other moral norms that condemned murder, stealing, and war.

According to a number of legends, Topiltzin, the Toltec ruler of the city of Tula, who adopted the name of Quetzalcóatl and who lived in the tenth century of our era, possessed the qualities of a cultural hero. As told

in these legends, he taught the inhabitants of Tula the art of goldsmithing, forbade them to engage in human and animal immolation, and permitted only flowers, bread, and fragrance to be offered as sacrifices to the gods. Topiltzin condemned murder, war, and stealing. According to legend, he had the appearance of a white man, though with dark rather than blond hair. Some say that he went away across the sea, others that he left in a burning flame that ascended into the sky, leaving the morning star as a promise of his return.

This hero was said to have exhorted the peoples of Mesoamerica to the humanist way of life, the *toltecayotl*, which was adopted not only by the Toltecs but also by the neighboring peoples who inherited the Toltec tradition. This style of life was based on the principles of the brotherhood of all human beings, perfectibility, esteem and respect for labor, honesty, keeping one's word, the study of the secrets of nature, and an optimistic outlook on the world.

The legends of the Mayan peoples of the same period relate the activities of the ruler or priest of the city of Chichén Itzá and founder of the city of Mayapán, a person named Kukulcán, who was the Mayan analogue of Quetzalcóatl. Another representative of the humanist tendency in Mesoamerica was the ruler of the city of Texcoco, the poet-philosopher Netzahualcóyotl, who lived from 1402 to 1472. This philosopher also rejected human sacrifice and preached friendship among all human beings, and he exercised a profound influence on the culture of the peoples of Mexico.

In South America we can observe a similar movement at the beginning of the fifteenth century. This movement is associated with the names of Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui, who took the name Pachacutéc or "reformer," and his son Topa Inca Yupanqui, and with the expansion of the cult of the god Viracocha. As in Mesoamerica, Pachacutéc, like his father Ripa Yupanqui, took the title "god" and called himself Viracocha. The moral norms by which the society of Tahuantinsuyo was officially governed were linked to his cult and to reforms instituted by Pachacutéc, who like Topiltzin had the qualities of a cultural hero.

And here I will end the quotation from this monograph, which, of course, is part of a long and substantive work.

In reading these two excerpts, I have wanted to bring to your attention examples of what we call the humanist attitude in regions that are far removed from each other, and also to show that we can, of course, find this attitude in distinct periods of various cultures. I say "distinct periods," because this attitude seems to advance and retreat in a pulsating way over the course of history, and many times even to disappear altogether, generally at moments preceding the collapse of a civilization. You can understand that establishing correspondences between civilizations on the basis of their humanist "moments" or periods is a vast undertaking, something of great scope.

If today ethnic and religious groups are turning within themselves in order to find a stronger identity, then what is underway is a kind of cultural or regional chauvinism that threatens to produce clashes with other ethnic groups, cultures, or religions. And yet, if all persons have a legitimate love for their own people and their own culture, then they can also understand that in their people and its roots there exists or has existed that "humanist moment" that makes them by definition universal, makes them of a kind with that "other" culture or religion or ethnic group they are facing. Thus, what we have are diversities that cannot be erased by one side or the other. These diversities are not a hindrance or a defect or something backward-rather, they constitute the very richness of humanity. The problem lies not in diversity but in how to achieve a convergence of all those diversities, and this is what occurs in a "humanist moment," and is what I mean when I speak of "points of convergence."

Finally, I would like to pick up the thread of my argument on the state of the humanist question at the present time. I have said that after the catastrophes of the two world wars, the philosophers of existence reopened the debate on the subject of humanism, a subject that had been thought dead and gone. But this debate took as its starting point the conceiving of humanism as a philosophy, when in reality it had never been a philosophical position but rather a perspective and an attitude toward life and things.

If, in this debate, the nineteenth-century description of the human being was taken for granted, then we can hardly be surprised that thinkers such as Foucault should accuse humanism of being part of that whole nineteenth-century philosophical approach. Even earlier, Heidegger had expressed his anti-humanism in his "Letter on Humanism," in which he dismissed humanism as just another "metaphysic." Perhaps the discussion was influenced by the position of Sartrean existentialism on humanism, which posed the question in philosophical terms. But viewing all this from the perspective of today, it seems to me exaggerated to accept an interpretation of something as though it were the thing itself, and then, based simply on that interpretation, to go on to attribute certain characteristics to the thing itself.

In their works, Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, and many structuralists declared their anti-humanism, just as others defended humanism as a metaphysics or, at the least, an anthropology. In reality, however, Western historical humanism had never, in any instance, been a philosophy, even in Pico della Mirandola or Marsilio Ficino. The fact that many such philosophers manifested a humanist attitude in no way implies that this attitude was itself a philosophy. Furthermore, if Renaissance Humanism displayed an interest in the subjects of "moral philosophy" as it was called, that concern should be understood as part of efforts aimed at dismantling the manipulation of that field practiced by medieval Scholasticism.

From those errors in the interpretation of humanism-taking humanism to be a philosophy-one can easily arrive at any number of positions, including naturalistic positions such as those expressed in the "Humanist

Manifesto" of 1933 or social-liberal positions such as those in the "Humanist Manifesto II" of 1974. In this way, authors such as Lamont have defined their humanisms as naturalist and anti-idealist, affirming an anti-supernaturalism, a radical evolutionism, the non-existence of the soul, the self-sufficiency of the human being, free will, an intraworldly ethic, the value of art, and humanitarianism. I believe that people have every right to define their particular conception in this way if they so choose, but it seems to me unwarranted to go beyond that to claim that Western historical humanism moved within these same directions. I further believe that the proliferation of various "humanisms" in recent years is perfectly legitimate, as long as those movements present themselves as particular manifestations of humanism, without claiming to stand in some absolute way for all of humanism in general. And lastly, I also believe that today humanism has reached the conditions to become a philosophy, a morality, an instrument of action, and a style of life.

Thus, the entire recent philosophical debate with a historical and, moreover, localized humanism has been wrongly posed. The debate in fact is only now beginning, and henceforth Anti-humanism will have to justify its objections in light of the positions of today's universalist New Humanism. We also need to recognize that this entire discussion has been a bit provincial, and that the idea that humanism was born at a certain time and place, was debated in a certain time and place, and some perhaps wished to export it to the world as a model of that time and place-that idea has gone on long enough. Let's concede, then, that the "copyright," the monopoly on the word "humanism" is held by a single geographical area. And we have, of course, been talking about a humanism that is Western, European, and to some degree Ciceronian. But since we have maintained that humanism was never a philosophy but rather a perspective and an attitude toward life, can we not then extend our investigation into other regions and recognize that this humanist attitude also manifested similarly in places other than Europe? If not-if we insist on defining historical humanism as a philosophy and, in addition, a specifically Western philosophy-we not only err, but we also throw up an insurmountable barrier to dialogue with the expressions of the humanist attitude that exist in all the cultures of the Earth. If I insist on this point, it is not only because of the theoretical consequences that such errors have had and still have, but also because of the their immediate practical consequences.

In historical humanism there has existed the strong belief that knowledge and the mastery of natural laws would lead to the liberation of humankind, that this knowledge existed in various cultures, and that one should learn from all of them. But today we see that knowledge, science, and technology are manipulated, and that knowledge has often served as an instrument of domination. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have believed that religion has clouded people's minds and, paternalistically, have sought to impose freedom by attacking religions. Today, however, we are witnessing violent religious reactions that show no respect for freedom of conscience. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have viewed all cultural differences as "divergent," insisting that all customs and lifestyles be made uniform. Today we are witnessing violent reactions as some cultures attempt to impose their own values with no respect for diversity. The world has changed, and our experience has grown...

Yet today, in the face of this tragic submergence of reason, in the face of growing symptoms of the neo-irrationalism that appears to be invading us, we can still hear echoes of the primitive rationalism in which a number of generations have been educated. They seem to be saying: "We were right in wanting to do away with religions, because had we succeeded there wouldn't still be all these religious wars today! We were right in trying to wipe out diversity because, had we succeeded, today the fires of ethnic and cultural conflict wouldn't be flaring up anew."

But those rationalists have not managed to impose their own particular philosophical cult, or their own particular style of life, or their own particular culture-and that's what counts.

What counts more than anything is the discussion to resolve the serious conflicts developing today. How much longer will it take us to realize that there is no one culture whose intellectual or behavioral patterns are models that all of humanity must follow? I say all this because perhaps now is the time for us to reflect with some seriousness on changing the world and ourselves. Of course, it is easy to say that other people ought to change-the problem is that those people think the same thing, that other people should change. Isn't it time, then, that we began to recognize the humanity of others, to recognize the diversity of you, of all of us?

I believe that today, more than ever, there is an urgent need to change the world, and that such change, if it is to be positive, is indissolubly linked to personal change. After all, my life has meaning if I want to live it, and if I can choose or struggle to attain the conditions I want for my existence and for life in general. Living with this antagonism between the personal and the social has not yielded very good results-instead, we must discover whether it might not make more sense to bring these two terms-the personal and the social-into a convergent relationship. Living with this antagonism between cultures has not led us in the right direction-instead, we need to go beyond lip-service recognition of cultural diversity to reexamine the real possibility of convergence toward a universal human nation.

Finally, many defects have been attributed to the humanists of various times. It has been said that Machiavelli, too, was a humanist striving to understand the laws that govern power, that Galileo displayed a sort of moral weakness in the face of the barbarity of the Inquisition, that among Leonardo's inventions were numbered advanced weapons of war that he designed for the Prince. And in that vein it has been said that numerous contemporary writers, thinkers, and scientists have displayed just such weaknesses. Surely in all this there is much truth. But we must be fair in our appraisal of the facts. Einstein, for example, had nothing

to do with the fabrication of the atomic bomb. His merit lies in his explanation of the photoelectric effect, from which the photoelectric cell and so many resulting industries have arisen, including video and television. But his genius stands out, above all, in the formulation of a great physical law: the theory of relativity. And Einstein showed no moral weakness in the face of the new Inquisition. Nor did Oppenheimer, who was given the Manhattan Project to construct an artifact that, as a purely deterrent weapon never to be used against human beings, would put an end to all conflict worldwide. Oppenheimer was unconscionably betrayed, and then he raised his voice, calling out to the moral conscience of all scientists. For that he was fired, and for that he was persecuted under McCarthyism. Many moral shortcomings attributed to people who have embodied a humanist attitude in reality have nothing to do with their stance toward society or science, but rather with their behavior and attitude as human beings in facing pain and suffering. If, for his integrity and moral fortitude in facing martyrdom, the figure of Giordano Bruno is the paradigm of the classical humanist, then in contemporary times both Einstein and Oppenheimer can in the same way justly be considered true humanists. And why, outside the field of science, should we not consider Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King to be genuine humanists? Was Schweitzer not a humanist?

I am certain that millions of people the world over embody a humanist attitude toward life, but here I cite only a few well-known figures, because they constitute models of the humanist position who are recognized by everyone. I realize that in these individuals some might be able to object to a certain behavior, or to a certain way of doing things, or to their timing, or to their tact, but what we cannot deny is their commitment to other human beings. In any case, I am not one to pontificate on who is or is not a humanist-I wish only to give my opinion, with all the limitations that apply, about Humanism. But if someone should insist that I define the humanist attitude in today's world, I would simply reply, in few a words, that any person who struggles against discrimination and violence, creating new alternatives that make liberty and freedom of choice a reality for all human beings-that person is a humanist.

Thank you very much.