



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Humanism, a new idea

Dreams of science

Michal Meyer

I am because you are

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Humanizing globalization

Mireille Delmas-Marty

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Forest Whitaker

A special place for the imagination

Antonio Skármeta

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OUR AUTHORS

UNESCO in 2011:

Towards a new humanism and globalization that rhymes with reconciliation

In 1951, during a 'Discussion on the Cultural and Philosophical Relations Between East and West' held in the capital of India, New Delhi, from 13 to 20 December, UNESCO endorsed the idea of a new holistic humanism. The world was recovering from a terrible war that had sullied the myth of technological progress dominating Western culture. In a discussion document entitled 'Towards a New Humanism', the participants at the meeting spoke of a "confused intelligence that has lost its soul" and a "crisis of humanism". They advocated a "spiritual revolution" and "common spiritual progress" calling for greater exchange between East and West (p. 27).

Six decades later, the challenges facing the world have moved on, as has

our understanding of the meaning of humanism. In March 2011, UNESCO held a meeting of its High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures at the UN headquarters in New York. Comprising some twenty distinguished figures from all over the world, the Panel agreed that "rethinking peace and reconciliation resonated with the quest for a New Humanism for the 21st Century," called for by the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova.

"In the context of globalization," says the final report on the meeting, "this concept has to concentrate on cultural diversity, dialogue in the age of the Internet, and reconciliation between the North and the South [...] The new humanism has to be an authentically pluralist cosmopolitanism, inspiring

reflections and expressing aspirations from everyone everywhere."

According to a section of the report entitled 'Towards a new humanism and reconciled globalization', the purpose of the new humanism is to "create a climate of empathy, belonging and understanding, along with the idea that progress with respect to human rights is never definitive and requires a constant effort of adaptation to the challenges of modernity. Those challenges cannot be met without ethical principles, which should be at the foundation of what was aptly coined 'a public realm of values.'"

The conclusions of the Panel meeting, in March 2011, can be found at the following address:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001923/192362e.pdf>



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Editorial – Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO 5

HUMANISM: A NEW IDEA

Where is humanism going? – Sanjay Seth 6

I am because you are – Michael Onyebuchi Eze 10

What happened to hospitality? – Asimina Karavanta 14

Justice and dignity – Paulette Dieterlen 16

Towards a humanist turn – Oliver Kozlarek 18

The Muslim phase of humanism – Mahmoud Hussein 22

For a world of harmony – Liu Ji 25

UNESCO in 1951: Towards a new humanism 27

Humanizing globalization – Mireille Delmas-Marty 28

interviewed by Jasmina Šopova

Digital humanism – Milad Doueïhi 32

Welcome to the Anthropocene – Ruth Irwin 34

Dreams of science – Michal Meyer 36

Bioethics: unimagined challenges – Salvador Bergel 39

Seven pointers for the future of mankind – Cristovam Buarque 41

OUR GUEST

Child soldiers: a new life ahead – Forest Whitaker 44

interviewed by Katerina Markelova

THE FUTURE OF THE BOOK

A special place for the imagination – Antonio Skármeta 47

OVERCOMING DISABILITY

The flight of Prudence – *The story of Prudence Mabhena* 51

As told by Roger Ross Williams to Cathy Nolan

MILESTONES

UNESCO welcomes 53

Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Alsou Abramova, Blaise Compaoré, Roger-Pol Droit, Jorge Edwards, Ángeles González-Sinde, The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Herbie Hancock, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Pascal Irénée Koupaki, Julia Kristeva, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, Brigi Rafini, Roberto Toscano, Abdoulaye Wade



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Faces à l'Âme by
French artist,
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Dialogue between
cultures. Fusion of
contemporary and
traditional art.

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In this issue

"The affirmation of human commonality and dignity is something that is no less urgent today than at any time before," says Professor Sanjay Seth (India), in his introduction to this special feature (p. 6). He puts forward a number of thought-provoking ideas on contemporary humanism, like questioning the notion of a singular Reason, the cohabitation of different visions of morality developed around the world, or the need for a global form of justice. Issues like these are discussed in depth from a range of viewpoints by Nigerian-born Michael Onyebuchi Eze (p. 10), Asmina Karavanta from Greece (p. 14) and Paulette Dieterlen from Mexico (p. 16).

The humanist turn that is currently underway draws on humanist traditions in all cultures, according to the German philosopher Oliver Kozlarek (p. 18). Indeed certain aspects of contemporary Islamic philosophy have their roots in the very idea of humanism (p. 22), says Mahmoud Hussein, an Egyptian political scientist and Islamic scholar. And the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius could be seen as a model for the development of the new humanism imagined by Professor Liu Ji of China (p. 25).

If humanist principles are not turned into practice, though, humanism will remain no more than wishful thinking. In these times of globalization, we need to make use of the "envisioning forces" of law to forge a humanist form of justice that is pluralist and open, says the French lawyer, Mireille Delmas-Marty (p. 28). Among other evidence to support her case, she cites two major challenges of modernity: climate change and new digital and biomedical technologies, which are also discussed by Milad Doueïhi (USA) (p. 32), Ruth Irwin, from New Zealand (p. 34), Michal Meyer of Israel (p. 36) and Salvador Bergel from Argentina (p. 39).

To conclude this special feature, the Brazilian senator, Cristovam Buarque outlines his proposal for a new humanism based on seven pillars: planetary politics, respect for diversity, respect for the environment, equal opportunities, production controlled by man, integration through education and ethical modernity (p. 41).

Our guest for this issue is the American actor and film-maker, Forest Whitaker, recently appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. He is committed

to the cause of child soldiers, explaining what drew him to this barren and tragic universe, so far removed from the luxury of Hollywood (p. 44).

The future of the book is a subject close to the heart of the Chilean writer, Antonio Skármeta. Author of the novel, *Burning Patience* (which inspired Michael Radford's film *Il Postino*) he predicts that the various types of media will continue to exist, side by side – the digital book, that faithful ally of research and information, and the paper book, which is ideally suited to "non-utilitarian imagination" (p. 47).

To mark *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* (3 December), we will be publishing an interview with the American director Roger Ross Williams, whose film *Music by Prudence* won him an Oscar for best short documentary. He tells of meeting a young Zimbabwean woman, Prudence, who lost both her legs, yet, through her singing, managed to overcome a number of obstacles, including rejection by her family, discrimination and poverty (p. 51).

Jasmina Šopova



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Editorial

Irina Bokova

Humanism is an age-old promise, as well as an idea that is always new, endlessly reinventing itself. The humanist project has been part of our history since Antiquity, yet it shines like new in every epoch. In the early years of the third millennium the word can no longer have the same meaning as it had during the Renaissance in Europe, when it was forged on the image of the ideal man, master of himself and the universe. It also goes beyond the meanings that the Enlightenment philosophers gave it, and which have remained, despite their universalist aspirations, restricted to a Eurocentric vision of the world.

Respect for cultural diversity is a core element of 21st century humanism. It is a vital constituent during these times of globalization. No single culture has a universal monopoly. Each and every one can contribute to the consolidation of our shared values.

The current threats to the planet's precarious ecological balance, the ethical problems raised by digital and biomedical technologies, the economic and political crises –these are all global challenges that demand concerted responses. The humanism that is emerging today has to provide a framework for our common thoughts and reflections on global issues.

And, beyond the theory, humanist values have, above all, to be translated into practice, in every facet of human activity. The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 constitutes a humanist agenda *par excellence*. A central preoccupation is the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. Humanism today also has a feminine side.

Humanist values form the very foundations of the philosophy of UNESCO. Written into its

constitution, they have been guiding the actions of our Organization for 65 years, in the promotion of a peace that is "founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind."

Beyond the theory, humanist values have above all to be translated into practice.

Building a responsible world of solidarity is a long-term endeavour that has to draw on all the creative forces of humanity. Culture, education, philosophy, science, information technology, law, and international cooperation provide us with the means. Building the ramparts of human dignity in everyday life is not a Utopian quest. Humanism is a promise we must all keep.



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➤ Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, at the Organization's headquarters, in February 2010, during the first meeting of the High Level Panel on Peace and Dialogue between Cultures. In March 2011, the Panel met again at the UN headquarters in New York, to discuss New Humanism for the 21st Century.

Where is humanism going?

At the heart of the notion of humanism is that something that we all share and which sanctions our aspirations towards equality, despite our differences. The Enlightenment philosophers looked for it in the crucible of a singular rationality; today we need to search at the crossroads of different visions of morality.

SANJAY SETH

Humanism is, amongst other things, the claim or intuition that all humans have something fundamental in common, and that this mandates equal entitlement to dignity and respect. This, however, does not serve to distinguish humanism 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, 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 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.

In this essay, 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, is the aspiration to affirm human commonality and dignity best served by humanism?

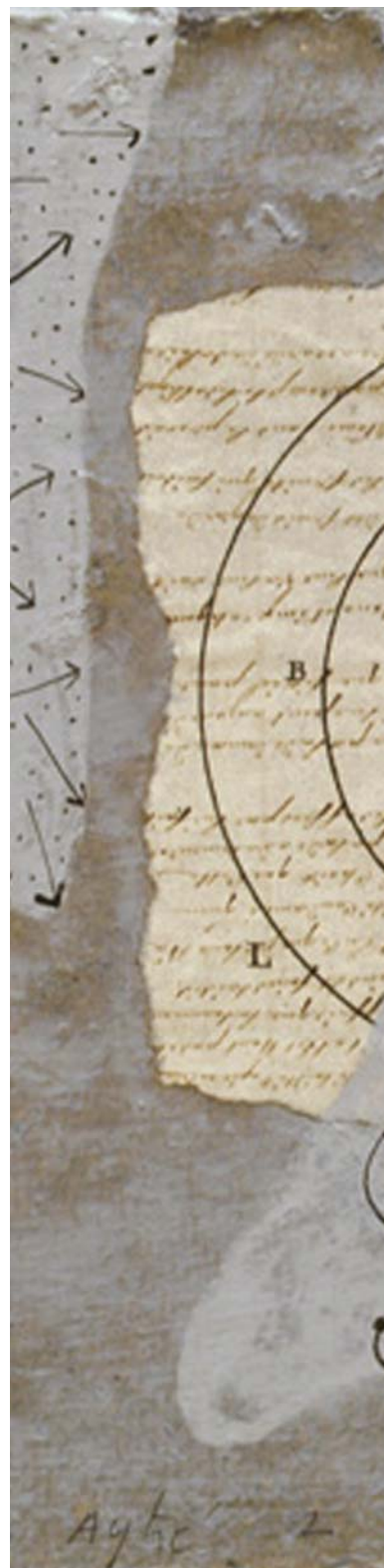
Man at the centre of the universe

Edward Said¹ 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. At the core of humanism, then, is a philosophical anthropology, which in according centrality to man diminishes (though it does not necessarily eliminate) the role accorded to god(s). Once the purposes and the acts of gods explained the world of men; with humanism, to understand the gods of men you have to understand the men, for their gods are the fantastical creation of their minds.

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. There are 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.

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



Part of the cycle, 'Theoria Sacra' by French painter and sculptor Richard Texier, reproduced with the kind permission of the artist. www.richardtexier.com

“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 traditional humanism.”



There have always been critics of these presumptions, including Hamann², Kierkegaard³, Adorno⁴, Horkheimer⁵, and Heidegger⁶. In the non-Western world, just as there were many who accepted and celebrated the values that were part of western humanism, there were also always those, like Gandhi⁷, Césaire⁸ and Fanon⁹, who were critics of a ‘civilisation’ that in purporting to exalt Man frequently degraded men. Nonetheless, 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.

I suggest, however, that 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 traditional humanism (see pp. 34-35). 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.

1. Edward Saïd [1935-2003], Palestinian American literary theorist and founding figure in postcolonial studies. Author of *Orientalism* (1978) and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004.)
2. Johann Georg Hamann [1730-1788], German philosopher, friend and intellectual opponent of Immanuel Kant. He was convinced that faith and belief, rather than knowledge, determine human actions.
3. Søren Kierkegaard [1813-1855], Danish Christian philosopher, known as the Father of Existentialism.
4. Theodor Adorno [1903-1969], German philosopher and social critic, and member, with Horkheimer and others, of the Frankfurt School of social theory and philosophy.
5. Max Horkheimer [1895-1973], German philosopher and sociologist, best known for his “critical theory” that combined Marxist-oriented political philosophy with social and cultural analysis informed by empirical research. He co-authored with Theodor Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).
6. Martin Heidegger [1889-1976], German philosopher, known for his phenomenological exploration of the question of being, and for his critique of philosophical humanism. Read: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper Torchbooks, 1977; “Letter on Humanism”, in *Basic Writings*, 1993.
7. Mahatma Gandhi [1869-1948], political and ideological leader, father of the Indian nation. His philosophy of nonviolent resistance inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.
8. Aimé Césaire [1913-2008], French poet from Martinique, one of the founders of the Négritude movement. Read: *Discourse on colonialism*, Monthly Review Press, 2000.
9. Frantz Fanon [1925-1961] French psychiatrist from Martinique, active member of the Algerian struggle for independence. Well known as a thinker on the issue of decolonization. Read: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 1963.

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The Enlightenment project

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" Kant¹⁰ 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 phrase¹¹) 'disenchanted'; if tradition and custom no longer seemed the source of Reason, or indeed, even reasonable; and if Hume's sceptical challenge¹² raised the possibility of as many reasons as there are persons; then what Reason was this, and whose Reason?

The most enduring answer 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, 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, but was the basis for our having any experience in the first place. 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.

Modern knowledge, as elaborated and defended by Kant and by the Enlightenment more generally, could now stake a claim to having validated or proven itself, thus revealing all earlier knowledge to have been speculation or dogma. And of course this singular Reason, which does not vary from culture to culture, proved that all humans, irrespective of the differences among them, were to be treated as ends in themselves, 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 inseparably bound with interests, culture and power, all do so by returning to Kant. 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.

Modern knowledge, as elaborated and defended by Kant and by the Enlightenment more generally, could now stake a claim to having validated or proven itself, thus revealing all earlier knowledge to have been speculation or dogma. And of course this singular Reason, which does not vary from culture to culture, proved that all humans, irrespective of the differences among them, were to be treated as ends in themselves, and not means.

The example of the political philosopher John Rawls¹³ 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 (see pp. 16-18) 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 to elaborate a pragmatic and procedural defence of a justice which is acknowledged to be Western and liberal, and cannot be passed off as 'universal'. (Rawls 1995 and 1996).

That which Rawls reluctantly 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. Here are their arguments: 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. 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 be very clear that I am not suggesting that the intellectual and cultural tradition of modern

10. Immanuel Kant [1724-1804], German philosopher and a pivotal figure in modern philosophy. "Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" is the title of an essay published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin Monthly), in 1784.

11. Max Weber [1864-1920], German sociologist and economist.

12. David Hume [1711-1776], one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment. Known especially for his philosophical empiricism and scepticism.

13. John Rawls [1921-2002], political philosopher. His book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), is considered as one of the primary texts in contemporary political philosophy. Quoted works: "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1995; *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 1996.

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.

In the era after decolonization, it should however be 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 Western culture and thought, cannot be sustained, and needs to be critically re-examined.

New avenues to explore

I began this essay by suggesting that humanism consists of an affirmation that all humans, notwithstanding their many differences, have something important in common, and thus that all humans should 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 that is subject to human



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knowledge and manipulation. The second is the presumption that the counterpart of a common humanity is a singular Reason.

I have gone on to argue that neither of these arguments or presumptions can be sustained; they were never true, and are more demonstrably untrue today than ever before. These were not ‘truths’ finally discovered, but rather have been 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; as the distinction between the human and the natural collapses; and as it becomes increasingly clear that what 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 characterise 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 suggest 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. ■

Sanjay Seth (India), held teaching or research positions in Sydney, Melbourne (Australia) and Tokyo (Japan), before joining Goldsmiths, University of London (United Kingdom) in 2007, where he is Professor and Head of Politics and co-Director of the Centre for Postcolonial Studies.

“Homo Mundo”, sculpture by French artist, Richard Texier, reproduced by kind permission of the author.

www.richardtexier.com

I am because you are

For many people in the Bantu language countries of Africa, the term *Ubuntu/botho* encapsulates all the qualities of a respected member of society. But the term is also used by Africanist scholars as a critique of colonialist doctrine and even forms the core of a humanist ideology upon which the new democratic South Africa is constructed.



Ask anyone on the streets of Harare, Johannesburg, Lusaka or Lilongwe (in Southern and Eastern Africa) what they understand by *Ubuntu/botho* and they will probably list the virtues to which a person in these societies is expected to aspire – such as compassion, generosity, honesty, magnanimity, empathy, understanding, forgiveness and the ability to share. Indeed, *Ubuntu/botho* (or the local equivalent in the various Bantu language groups)¹ is understood as the very definition of ‘person’ or ‘personhood’. But the term *Ubuntu/botho* impregnates societies in the region to a much greater extent, forming the

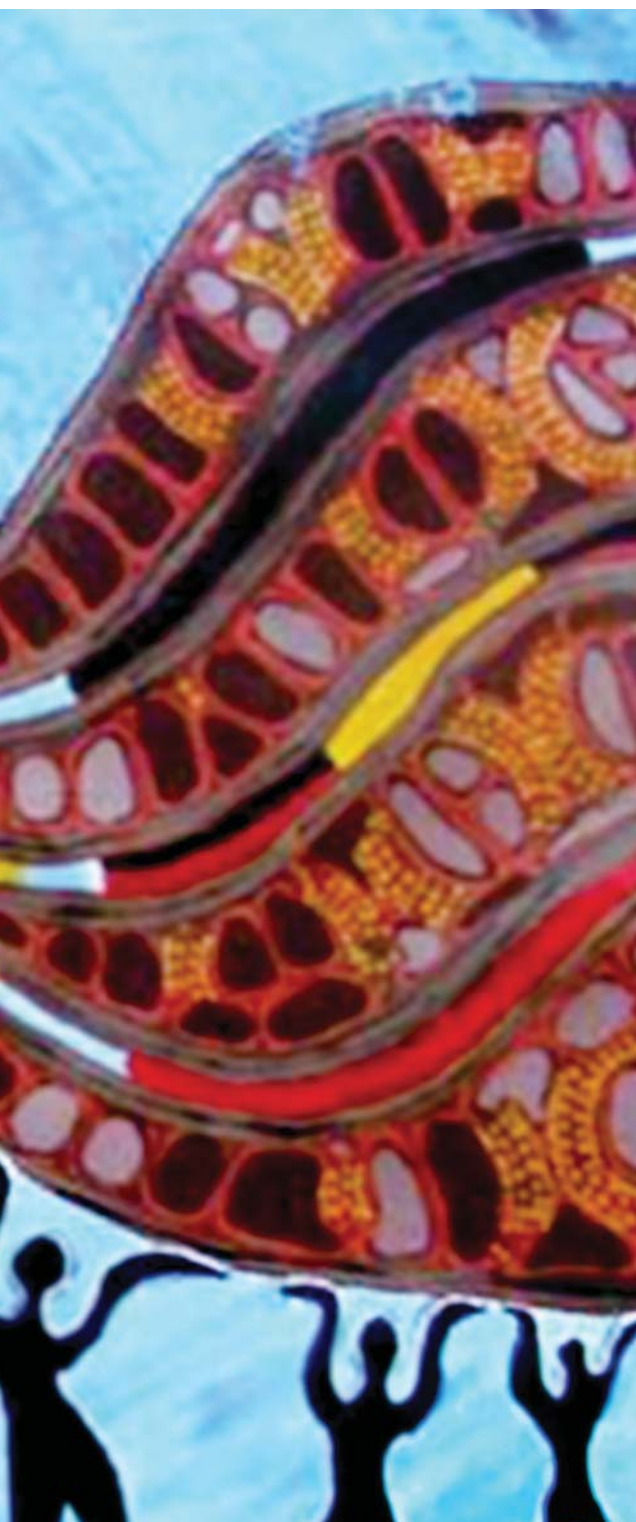
basis for communitarian ethics, discourses on identity and even a burgeoning pan-African ideology.

In terms of contemporary Africanist discourse, though, *Ubuntu/botho* is best understood as a critique of the logic of colonialism – the process of attempting to “humanize” or “civilize” non-Western cultures through colonization. Colonialism was a powerful and condescending narrative that thrived through a pretext of “humanizing” or “civilizing” non-Western peoples. The consequences of this false doctrine of humanism were to become the bedrock of colonial practices in Africa, as an institutionalized form of social Darwinism² nurtured by racist capitalism.

Racist capitalism is a theory in which a person’s race determines his or her life choices or potential, like the kind of job to have, where to live, the kind of person to marry, the kind of school to attend, and so on. The effects of this theory on the South African experience can be seen in the many draconian laws aimed at curbing the potentialities of the black person. This system motivated the 1913 Land Act that forbade blacks from buying lands in South Africa; the colour bar of 1918; the Bantu Education Act of 1953 which abolished the teaching of African history; the job Reservation Act which gave priority to whites in matters of employment; the various segregation policies from as early as 1907 that restricted the movement of blacks and reduced them to mere instruments of labour.

As early as 1858, the South African-Boer constitution had already ruled out any form of equality between blacks and whites in matters of State or Church. The prevailing argument was that forced labour was ordained by God as a divine privilege for the white race to claim authority of domination over blacks, as the then president of the South-African Republic, Paul Kruger, informed his Volksraad [Peoples’ Council] in August 1897 – “Our constitution wants no equality and equality is also against the Bible, because social classes were also applied by God.” And, later, in his Memoirs, he wrote: “...where there were only a handful of white men to keep hundreds of thousands of blacks in order, severity was essential. The black man had to be

Colonialism was a powerful and condescending narrative that thrived through a pretext of “humanizing” or “civilizing” non-Western peoples. The consequences of this false doctrine of humanism were to become the bedrock of colonial practices in Africa, as an institutionalized form of social Darwinism nurtured by racist capitalism.



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1. The term *Ubuntu/botho* is generally derived from a vernacular mode of referring to a ‘person’ among the peoples of southern, eastern, (some western) and central Africa, generally referred to as the Bantu language groups. The Shona call a ‘person’ in the singular *munhu* and in the plural *vanhu*. The Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele call a ‘person’ *umuntu* in the singular and *abantu* in the plural. The Sotho and Tswana refer to a ‘person’ as *muthu* in the singular and *bathu* in the plural.
2. A derivative of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Social Darwinism means that stronger nations have the moral authority or even an obligation to conquer, subjugate and dominate weaker nations. It is simply the natural order of things.

taught that he came second, that he belongs to the inferior class which must obey and learn.”

This mindset would form the political blueprint for South Africa’s colonial history and was the foundation upon which the new South Africa gained national sovereignty. But if the South African colonial state had been founded upon the ideology of social Darwinism, what should be the ideological foundation of the new, democratic, independent state? This is where Ubuntu/botho comes in.

As a public discourse, Ubuntu/botho has gained recognition as a peculiar form of African humanism, encapsulated in the following Bantu aphorisms, like *Motho ke motho ka batho babang; Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other people). In other words, a human being achieves humanity through his or her relations with other human beings. But this understanding does not need to generate an oppressive structure, where the individual loses his or her autonomy in an attempt to maintain a relationship with an ‘other’.

Many Africanist scholars would describe Ubuntu/botho as an arbitrary communitarian ethics that admits the individual’s good and welfare only as a secondary necessity. But a critical reading of this condition of relationship to others might suggest that a person’s humanity flourishes through a process of relation and distance, of uniqueness and difference. A realization of the subjective gifts (of humanity) we bear to each other motivates an unconditional desire to view and harness other people’s uniqueness and difference, not as a threat but as a complement to one’s own humanity. The Christian African philosopher, J. S. Mbiti’s now classic phrase, “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am”, captures a key feature of this kind of subjective formation through relation and distance. Mbiti subscribes to an affirmation of human subjectivity that puts communitarian good before individual good. I disagree, however, with this prioritizing of the community over the individual. Neither is prior. The relation with the ‘other’ is one of subjective equality, where the mutual recognition of our different but equal humanity opens the door to unconditional tolerance and a deep appreciation of the ‘other’ as an embedded gift that enriches one’s humanity.

A unifying ideology?

Within the contemporary history of South Africa, there are three main ways in which Ubuntu has been understood:

First is the assumption that Ubuntu is merely an anachronistic philosophy produced by African academics. Here Ubuntu functions as an alternative narrative to replace colonial logic, a desperate discourse of identity – a

sledgehammer kind of ethics that helps us to deal with the traumas of modernity and globalization. The argument is that, since we cannot positively identify Ubuntu as an authentic historical culture, it remains an invented discourse, in an alien format. Being ‘invented’, Ubuntu is more or less an ‘empty concept’ through which Africanist academics perform a supple manoeuvre of identity formation using an ‘imported’ cultural nationalism. Evidence is sought from different African cultural traditions to homogenize a range of values that are then represented as Ubuntu. Ubuntu is thus generalized as a universal African value, irrespective of the actual historical context of the societies that practice it. However, Ubuntu does not need to generate a homogenous historicity³ to become an authentic African value. And neither does a lack of historical authenticity deprive Ubuntu of such normative legitimacy.

As a public discourse, Ubuntu/botho has gained recognition as a peculiar form of African humanism.

The second conjecture is that Ubuntu has the character of an ideology, appropriated for political ends, as was evident in its application during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the initial draft constitution of South Africa. As an ideology it can be applied as a ‘magic wand’ to deal with every emergent social crisis. And as an ideology, its usage can also be abused and ceases to be an ethical value, becoming a value-commodity which is then appropriated to create a positive corporate or brand image, as in ‘Ubuntu security’, ‘Ubuntu restaurant’, ‘Ubuntu linux’, ‘Ubuntu cola’, etc.

The third sequence is a vision of history in which Ubuntu/botho is considered within the historical context in which it emerged. Being historical, it also gains an emotional and ethical legitimacy, since it is signified as a good that remains internal to the practices of a community where Ubuntu/botho values are invoked.

The question, then, is whether Ubuntu/botho, construed as an ideology, precludes all possibilities of creative historicity?⁴ My answer is no! The context in which Ubuntu/botho emerged (even as an ideology) in the political history of South Africa was an attempt to configure a theory of political succession that is consistent with the vision of an

3. The idea that African historiography is a single historical narrative irrespective of many cultures, people(s) and traditions that inhabit the geographical place called Africa.

4. Creative historicity argues that history is neither a fixation on the past nor a mere chronology of events. Good history is open to multiple influences and contexts.

Everyday life under Apartheid



A beach for Whites only in Cape Town, South Africa, in January 1970



emergent national imaginary. Irrespective of its doubtful origins, the moment at which Ubuntu/botho became a public virtue that is easily recognized by all South Africans, constitutes its historicity. The lack of authentic historical origins (in written records, or as a nuanced cultural dogma) does not neutralize its credibility.



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Understood as a narrative of a new national consciousness, Ubuntu not only offers an emotional legitimacy to displace the *old* political order; it also gives the *new* political order a sense of identity and political purpose. While the old order thrived on a notion of citizenship based on discrimination and difference, the new regime attempted to gain legitimacy by trying to forge a notion of democratic citizenship that thrives through inclusion and civic virtues. But the new dispensation has to be based on a system that excludes the oppressive structures of the past, and adopts instead a system of values that is built on a notion of rights and the unconditional dignity of the human person. At this point, the 'notion' of Ubuntu assumes an ethical character in forging a new sense of national identity.

Critics of the use of Ubuntu as a unifying ideology argue that it is merely an incoherent, invented ethics with no history. But ideologies do not predate history; they emerge as a response to specific issues within a historical epoch, challenging, correcting or displacing a mindset (or old ideology). The challenge, then, is to see whether Ubuntu can be rehabilitated as an ideology, focusing primarily on its normative essence, or whether the lack of historicity will always deny it any real substance.

At the same time, the practice of the human virtues through which a Bantu becomes a *Munhu*, *Umuntu*, or a *Muntu* (etc) is not external, but internal to the context where it is practiced. Yet, Ubuntu has been able to transcend this moral relativism by generating an ethical practice, which all South Africans, irrespective of their socio-cultural background, have judged to be good. This evaluative norm was to become the inspiration for building the new South Africa, guarded by the need for *reconciliation and not division; forgiveness, not resentment; understanding, not vengeance; and ubuntu, not victimization* (see the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Documents of South Africa). These were time-honoured values to which most South Africans already aspired, paving the way for a new national imaginary. And this gives Ubuntu its moral authority. ■

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What happened to hospitality?

An ongoing series of crises and a growing number of refugees have transformed the socio-cultural landscape of the contemporary world. To address the challenges these changes have wrought, a new kind of humanism is required— one capable of responding to the needs of communities made up of different cultures that are forever multiplying.

ASIMINA KARAVANTA

Two world wars, concentration camps, sweat shops, and the other apparatus of global capitalism whatever their qualifying differences, are defining events of the twentieth century as having a very dark history. The victims of anticolonial and civil wars must also be factored in. This sombre tableau is evidence of the destructive potential that was lurking beneath the cloaks of Enlightenment philosophers once their humanistic discourses were transformed into an ideological privilege of only a certain kind of

human being and a certain kind of society, namely that of western cultural values.

The discrepancy between the promise of humanism and its instrumental role in colonialism, imperialism, and the slave trade, generated a severe critique of humanism and its ethically and politically contradicting principles that reached a climax in the 1960s. This systematic deconstruction of humanism as an incontestable universal¹ (see pp. 6-9) has intensified the need to reconfigure humanism from the perspective of those who were “only recently recognized as humans”² and their

respective communities and cultures, often diasporic, multilingual, and intercultural.

Because humanism is no longer solely the product of European monarchies and empires whose colonial projects grounded their ideological imperatives in Enlightenment ideals; because it no longer defines the nation exclusively as a monocultural, monolingual construct, it is “making a comeback” as a “newer variant, one that reprises an earlier humanism in which what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality, not the capacity to reason but vulnerability to suffering.”³

Humanism as a necessity

In view of the growing number of refugees and stateless people, of the successive economic and political crises, the rise of fundamentalisms, xenophobia and new forms of racism, and the subsequent revolts of masses demanding democracy, humanism emerges as part of the “need” – in the words of the Palestinian-American writer Edward Said (1935-2003) – for “deintoxicated, sober histories that make evident the multiplicity and complexity of history without allowing one to conclude that it moves forward impersonally, according to laws determined either by the divine or by the powerful.”⁴

“Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.”

Hannah Arendt

Said is known for having analyzed the historical, philosophical and literary values of Western humanism; he has studied Western humanism’s violent ideological impact on non-Western

📍 Exercise in a Lebanese secondary school to teach about dialogue, tolerance and peace, in 2003.

cultures. These ideas prompted heated debate after they appeared in his posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. For Said, as for others, humanism, “as the exertion of one’s faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret, and grapple with the products of language in history, other languages, and other histories,” [...] “is not a way of consolidating and affirming what ‘we’ have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as ‘commodified’, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties.”

The need to engage the ‘complexity of history’ by learning how to remember the forgetting of those constituencies and their heretofore marginalized and rejected cultures has become an imperative in the present age. If the 20th century is the “age of exilic consciousness,” as Said avers at the end of *Culture and Imperialism*,⁵ the 21st century is the age of *anthropos*, that is, of the human species. *Anthropos* means: having a human face.

Intercultural society

The ancient Greeks believed the human being’s specificity in relation to other species was that he lived in a society ruled by law, in other words, in a city state (*polis*, in Greek). The philosopher Aristotle [4th century BCE] developed the idea of human beings as “political animals” dwelling in the city [*bios politicos* in Greek]. Closer to our time the German-born American philosopher Hannah Arendt has depicted the modern day refugee as a *bios politicos* par excellence, but one bereft of a *polis*.

Today, the political and economic crises raging in the world are not only rapidly increasing the numbers of refugees but also stripping those recognized as citizens of a long-established right to work and a right to education. The citizen now becomes an *a-polis* citizen, one who is being deprived of rights. In the squares of Madrid, Cairo and Athens, to mention only a few recent cases of mass revolt, the stateless refugee meets the *a-polis* citizen. Even if their demands are different, they are bound by their shared claims to a democratic ideal that recognizes the *anthropos* as its first and most fundamental principle. Despite the differences in their political and economic positions, both the stateless refugee and the *a-polis* citizen require that a new *polis* be configured. In this new *polis*, where diversity of languages, traditions and myths constitute a daily reality, the practice of translation and transculturation are practices of survival.

One of humanism’s current challenges is how to develop conditions favourable to intercultural societies. In other words, how to create societies

1. See Judith Butler, Ernest Laclau and Savoy Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London & New York: Verso, 2000.

2. See contribution of Joan Anim-Addo, “Towards a Post-Western Humanism Made to the Measure of Those Recently Recognized as Human.” *Edward Said and Jacques Derrida: Reconstituting Humanism and the Global Hybrid*. Eds. Mina Karavanta and Nina Morgan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008. 250-274.

3. Honig, Bonnie. “Antigone’s Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism.” *New Literary History*, 41.1 (2010): 1-33.

4. Said, Edward, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

5. Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, 1993.



that will allow both the refugee and the native born citizen to establish exchanges that are at once durable and productive. When viewed as a common field shared by multiple alliances and potential affiliations, this intercultural society presupposes a radical reconfiguration of the institutions and social, educational and political discourses that should be addressing the needs of expanding intercultural communities in the nation-states and their supranational formations.

Interculturality is a condition, both ontological and political, that has already transformed the nation-state from within. But for human beings to be socially and politically recognized as singular yet also equal, it is necessary to reform education so as to enable the blossoming of an intercultural learning and living that is – in the words of French philosopher Jacques Derrida – continuously opening the laws of hospitality to the foreigner to whom “hospitality is due.”⁶

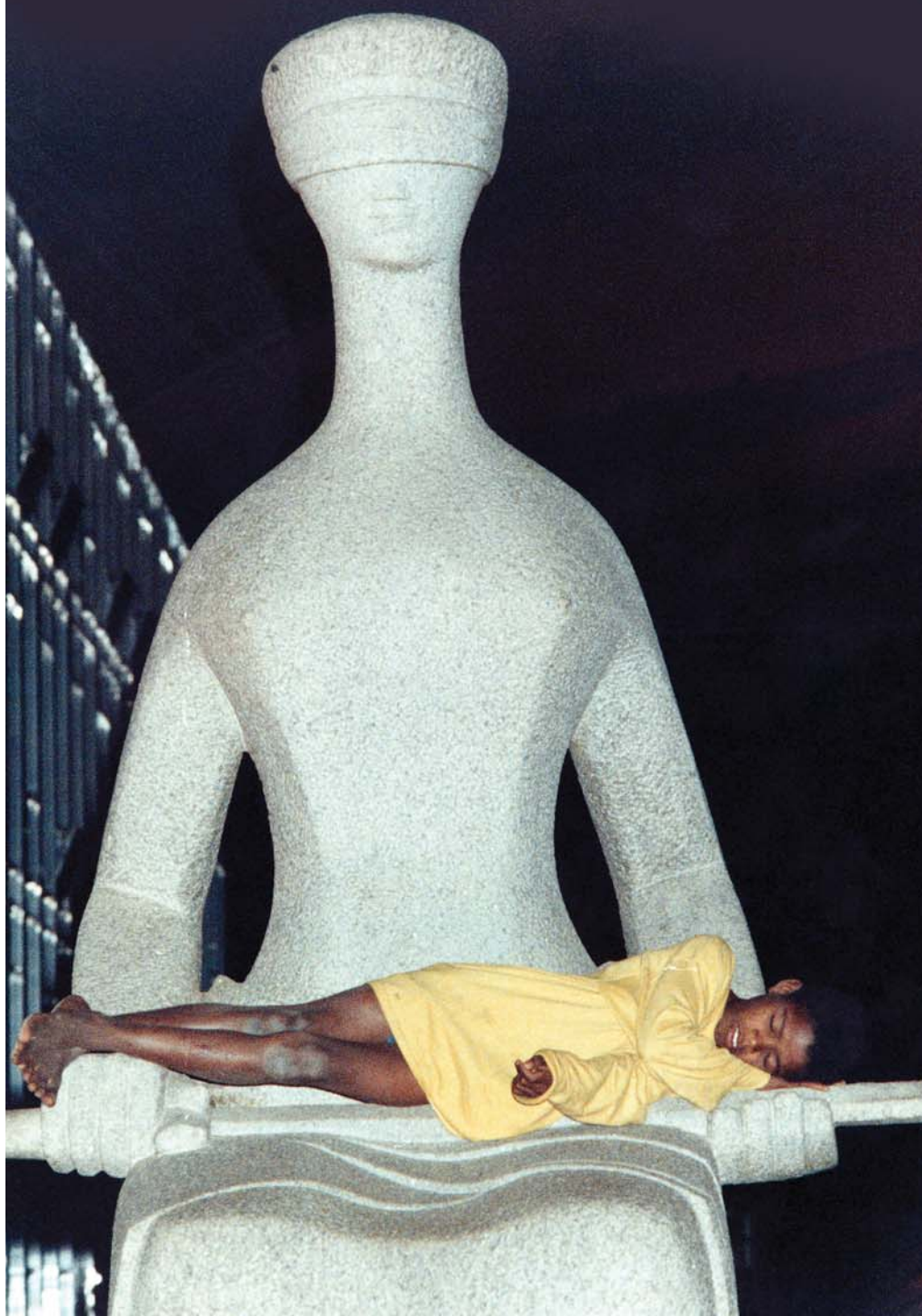
Building this kind of humanism, hospitable to the one who remains a foreign *anthropos*, and which by reconstituting its laws and discourses, speaks to her/his often radically different ontological and political condition is the task of the humanities today. According to the American feminist scholar Judith Butler, this task is “no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense.”⁷ In other words, it is to think of the human as the *anthropos* always already at stake, always already at risk, the face whose gaze is fixed on us in an open and persistent invitation for justice on a planetary scale. ■

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6. Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

7. Butler Judith. *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London & New York: Verso, 2004.

Justice



and dignity

Hundreds of millions of people suffer from hardship and poverty throughout the world, a situation that sanctions a philosophical approach promoting distributive justice. This theory underpins a truly humanist intervention when it is dispensed with respect for the dignity of the individual, his or her autonomy and personal responsibility.

PAULETTE DIETERLEN

Despite the numerous treaties, agreements and international summit meetings of the twentieth century, and the ongoing goal of combating poverty and reducing inequality in the world, one fact is clear: far from declining, poverty continues to grow. According to the World Bank, 1.4 billion people were living below the poverty level in 2008, surviving on less than \$1.25 per day, per person. The planet now supports nearly 7 billion people, which means that 20 per cent of the world's population do not have sufficient resources to meet basic needs; these people suffer inhumane treatment and are doomed to subsist in conditions of social, economic and political exclusion.

There is a theory in moral philosophy that deals directly with poverty and inequality: 'distributive justice'. This concept examines ways to alter the principles governing the distribution of goods and resources, when these principles do not respect the rights, worth and needs of each person.

The various facets of this theory arise from the particular vision of the human being that underpins one policy of distribution rather than another. For

example, an approach that views the most underprivileged people as passive, unable to set goals for themselves and determine their own needs, gives rise to paternalistic policies. Those receiving the distributed benefits cannot voice their opinions nor have any power over their essential rights, as others are deciding in their stead. This occurs frequently in many countries. In Mexico, for example, as part of a social housing programme, the government decided to put a laundry room into every house. But women were used to taking their washing down to the river. They turned the laundry rooms into family shrines, where their offerings ended up blocking the pipes.

If, however, we conceive of individuals not only as means but also as ends, the ensuing distribution policies must foster better economic and social conditions so that the beneficiaries can work toward achieving their life goals. This idea is based on the concept of the human being as an autonomous and worthy individual, able to choose from among the various options at hand.

Another version of distributive justice defines individuals essentially as economic agents seeking to 'maximize outcome,' in other words, to boost their income and/or their purchasing power. Proponents of this theory, which measures costs in monetary units and results in terms of 'units of outcome,' push for policies geared toward increasing the units of outcome for the most impoverished, to improve their well being and to mitigate their poverty. In this case, priorities are set according to their value for money. For example, in the USA a decision was taken regarding medical care that favoured State funding for operations to remove tonsils, rather than for renal dialysis, even though dialysis patients are far more seriously ill. The decision meant reaching a larger number of people at lesser cost.

If, however, we conceive of individuals not only as means but also as ends, the ensuing distribution policies must foster better economic and social conditions so that the beneficiaries can work toward achieving their life goals. This idea is based on the concept of the human being as an autonomous and worthy individual, able to choose from among the various options at hand. This is certainly the most ethical and humanist position offered by distributive justice. The Mexican "Progresá" programme is an example. Rather than offering food handouts, it runs education and information campaigns on health and nutrition and allocates subsidies to families, leaving them free to decide how to use the money.

Global justice

That being so, should distributive justice opt for the individual or the social group as the unit of distribution? This question pitches liberal thinkers, who have adopted an egalitarian position, against those who promote more communitarian theories. The latter maintain that individual-based social policies are deficient in that they fail to take into account the fact that human beings do not live in isolation, but are an inseparable part of a culture or social group that defines their identity. Hence the importance, for communitarian theorists, of factoring in the history and peculiarities of each community — as each social group

Ⓜ Outside the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court, in Brasilia, 1998

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develops specific forms of production, redistribution and consumption of goods and services.

Proponents of individual-based distributive justice maintain that communities are not uniform in nature and that it is therefore impossible to meet the criteria of distribution without giving priority to the individuals who form these communities.

Yet a third version of distributive justice exists, known as 'global justice'. This theory transcends the traditional concept of the nation-state, focusing instead on the problems posed by poverty and inequality on a worldwide scale. Theorists of global justice support a system of international institutions responsible for redressing injustices committed against individuals as residents of the planet, rather than as members of a community, or citizens in a particular country.

From a humanist viewpoint, these three theories — individual, communitarian and global — share the same goal: to implement policies of distributive justice, by viewing people as worthy individuals capable of exercising their own autonomy. The Mexican government is currently using incentives as part of its policies to combat poverty — people are able to express their needs and choose what seems to them most essential. This helps to strengthen the beneficiaries' sense of responsibility and their ability to make decisions.

If the person, in and of him- or herself, forms the cornerstone of this philosophy, and if policies to improve quality of life with decent conditions of equality and respect for rights are proposed, distributive justice can be said to comply with the values of humanism. ■

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Towards a Humanist turn

Instead of looking for the universal in biological nature, a recent humanist turn in the social sciences and humanities is focusing on what all human beings around the globe share, without neglecting their differences. And instead of thinking that a universal humanist culture has to be invented or imposed on other cultures, the new approach believes that universal ideas and values are already present in all cultures. It also acknowledges that people everywhere on the planet are sharing dehumanizing experiences — which should encourage us to consider what it means to live a humane and dignified life.

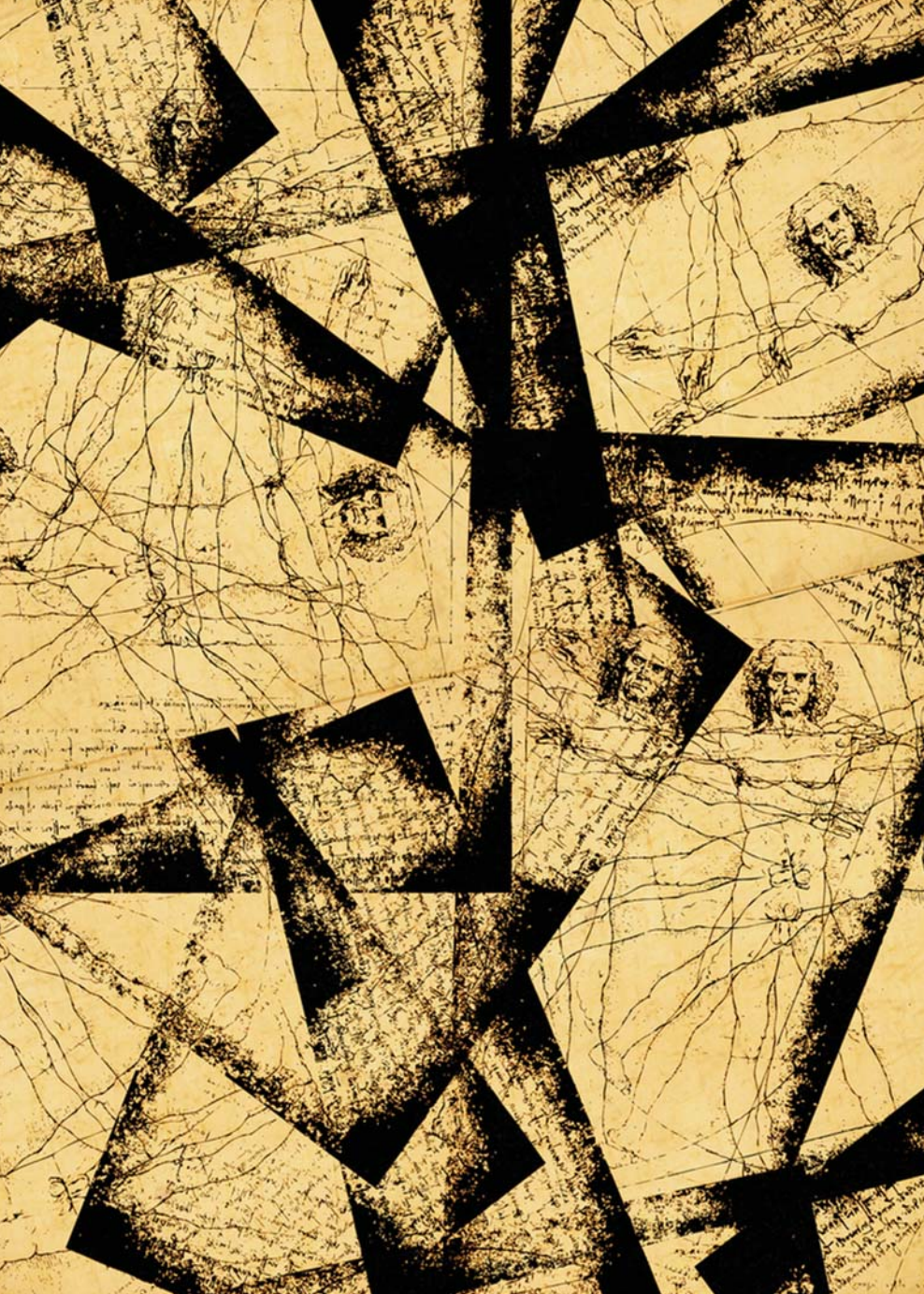
OLIVER KOZLAREK

In the 1960s social movements all around the globe started to modify their agendas. Instead of looking for universal solutions — which were increasingly identified with totalitarian ambitions — they began to pay more attention to the recognition of cultural, ethnic and sexual differences and identities. The student protests were perhaps the most emblematic sign of a profound reassessment of the role that culture plays in human life that was also being played out in theoretical debates and in politics throughout the 1960s and 70s. Simultaneously, intellectual and academic debates began to be interested more in culture and initiated what today is widely recognized as a 'cultural turn' in the social sciences and humanities.¹

This 'cultural turn' strengthened and propagated a number of values, including cultural pluralism and an

awareness that, in our modern world, it is important to reflect upon the coexistence of distinct cultures and forms of life, while at the same time resisting the temptation to reduce this plurality once more to an artificial, abstract unity dominated by one set of interests. And this provides us with a glimpse of the critical potential of the 'cultural turn'. In contrast to the idea that all human cultures are being propelled towards the same evolutionary end-goal (*telos*) — an idea that was promulgated by the influential 'modernization theories' in the first decades after World War II — the cultural turn rescues the idea that processes of civilization and culture — and their results — do not follow a logical, predetermined path.

But, however important the cultural turn may have been, I also believe that culturalism has given rise to a climate of cultural relativism that is not only dangerous but also incorrect. The errors in these positions, though evident, have been ignored for a long time. One of the



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📌 "Study of the proportions of the human body according to Vitruvius" by Leonardo da Vinci at the end of the 15th century, as reworked by Sri Lankan photographer, Janaka Dharmasena

most obvious is that different cultures are incommensurable and cannot be reconciled, while in fact they share many affinities and similarities.

The work of the German anthropologist, Christoph Antweiler, gives a spectacular account of how many 'norms, values and ideals' different cultures share². Antweiler suggests that we often do not see these similarities because we do not want to. However, he also suggests that if only we looked for similarities we would find them. With the right attitude, Antweiler tells us, we are able to see formulations of human rights not only in the 'West' but also in Confucianism, Buddhism and Islam. Antweiler's main argument is that the idea of the 'Clash of

Civilizations' — put forward by Samuel Huntington, and which proposes that different cultures are profoundly incommensurable — is wrong.

Antweiler's ideas seem to have hit a nerve. We can already see signs that culturalism is losing its energy. Many authors feel the need to look for normative tendencies across cultures, not so much to deny the reality of cultural differences, as to oppose cultural relativism. The question then is: with what can we identify, as human beings, beyond the cultural and national differences that separate us? Many are looking for a new orientation in some form of humanism. They seem to think that the simple fact of being human grants us a new form of global

solidarity. However, I do not believe that this shared humanity is sufficient; it is too abstract.

Instead, we must engage in a dialogue between cultures to discuss what it means to live a dignified life as a human being. It is within and through culture that we learn how to perceive ourselves as human beings. By studying and comparing different cultures we can see just how much they share. The 'humanist turn' and the 'cultural turn' must complement one another. This means that humanism must be intercultural and involve dialogue.

Lessons from traditional humanism

All cultures and civilizations have humanist traditions. But the 'humanist turn' is not a return to traditional forms of humanism. One of the problems with traditional forms of humanism is that they are inspired by historical experiences that are no longer ours. The humanism that accompanied the European Renaissance, for instance, cannot be detached from ambitions to challenge the authority of the Church.

Another problem is that many traditional forms of humanism are overly linked to naturalism. Again, the humanism of the European Renaissance could be quoted as an example. It was interested in discovering *the 'nature of Man' in accordance with the 'nature of the universe'*. This tradition of naturalism is still very much alive today in various scientific ideas that tend to reduce the human condition to biology. In contrast to naturalism, a new humanism needs to understand that we become human in and through culture.

But it would be equally mistaken simply to forget about the traditional forms of humanism that can be found in the legacies of many different cultures. It is in these traditions that we can find clear evidence for the fact that human beings share, and have always shared, very important ideas about what it means to be human. But learning from other traditions of humanism does not only mean to reaffirm what we already know. In his book on *Humanism in East Asian*

1. Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Rowohlt Verlag: 2006.

2. Christoph Antweiler: *Mensch und Weltkultur* [Man and World Culture], Transcript Verlag, 2010.



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Painting courtesy of Indian artist, Ananya Banerjee.

Confucianism³ Professor Chun-chieh Huang explains brilliantly that East Asian Confucianism was very much concerned with the harmonious relationship between human beings and the social and natural world that they are a part of. One cannot help thinking that a strong sense of 'world harmony' such as this could guide us through the ecological and social disasters accompanying the modern destruction of the natural world as well as the devastations of our social worlds. Questions like this have to be discussed within an intercultural perspective. And I am convinced that the social sciences and humanities provide excellent spaces in which this kind of intercultural dialogue among different traditions of humanism can be cultivated.

Shared experiences of dehumanization

An idea expressed by Erich Fromm,⁴ among others, supports the possibility of a common humanist understanding, despite differences. Humanism is always a consequence of experiences of alienation. It is an outcry from people who feel that the conditions for living a humanely dignified life are withering away. In a world like ours, individual experiences may vary greatly. In our global, modern world, chances are unevenly distributed, and economic, political and military powers are unevenly concentrated. However, it is also a world in which certain

experiences of alienation seem to transcend these differences. We are *all* suffering from the destruction of our natural environment; we are all living in societies where social relations suffer from a growing sense of mistrust. Those who are better off may try to compensate for the lack of satisfying social relations through consumption, while those who do not have the means experience a desperate longing for consumption. In most parts of the world people are exposed to old and new forms of violence and injustice. Political and economic institutions behave in ways that people can hardly identify with.

Again, despite considerable local and social differences, the experiences of human beings under these dehumanizing conditions tend to be very similar all over the planet. And this must surely be something we can learn from, if we compare contemporary cultures on a global scale. J. M. Coetzee's⁵ South Africa resembles Rubem Fonseca's⁶ Brazil; Octavio Paz's⁷ critique of modernity is similar to that found in the writing of Theodor W. Adorno⁸. Comparative research in the social sciences and humanities could extend our understanding of the dehumanization that people all over the planet are suffering.

Humanism in everyday life

By the same token, the 'humanist turn' should not be seen as an endeavour confined to academic or intellectual circles alone. Some time ago, the German historian, Jörn Rüsen, explained that humanism has to have 'practical' ambitions as well: "The idea of humanism must always be put into social contexts in order to make it plausible and give it its place in real life"⁹. What Rüsen expresses here seems to me to be of fundamental importance. It is only if humanism comes to constitute a central influence on the ways we think and act in everyday life that it can hope to begin to foster a humanist culture that is not only theoretical and abstract. It is my contention that this 'translation' of humanist ideas and values into everyday political, social and economic practices represents above all a task for political and economic institutions. But again, the social sciences and humanities can play an important role.

At least a part of their endeavour should be dedicated to the cultivation and promulgation of a humanist culture beyond the ivory tower.

To sum up, the current humanist turn that is starting to appear in many academic and non-academic arenas, seems to be motivated by the need to move beyond the awareness of cultural differences and to look for that which all human beings share, without neglecting the differences. Instead of looking for the universal in biological nature, or thinking that a universal humanist culture has to be invented or imposed on other cultures, the current humanist turn presupposes that universal ideas and values are already present in all different cultures. At the same time, the new humanism seems to recognize that global modernity needs normative orientations that all human beings can agree upon. And last but not least, it is a result of common experiences of alienation that global modernity has provoked in different parts of the world. The most important task, however, is to translate the ideas and values into everyday practices. ■

3. Chun-chieh Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts*, Transcript Verlag, 2010.

4. Erich Fromm (1900-1980), German-born American humanist psychoanalyst, and author of *Escape from Freedom*, 1941; *The Art of Loving*, 1956; *The Sane Society*, 1955.

5. J.M Coetzee, South African writer, Nobel Prize in Literature, 2003

6. Rubem Fonseca, Brazilian born writer

7. Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Mexican writer and essayist, Nobel Prize in Literature, 1990

8. Theodor W. Adorno (1903 – 1969), German-born sociologist, philosopher and musicologist

9. Jörn Rüsen/Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective. Experiences and Expectations*, Transcript Verlag, 2010.

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Instead of looking for the universal in biological nature, or thinking that a universal humanist culture has to be invented or imposed on other cultures, the current humanist turn presupposes that universal ideas and values are already present in all different cultures.

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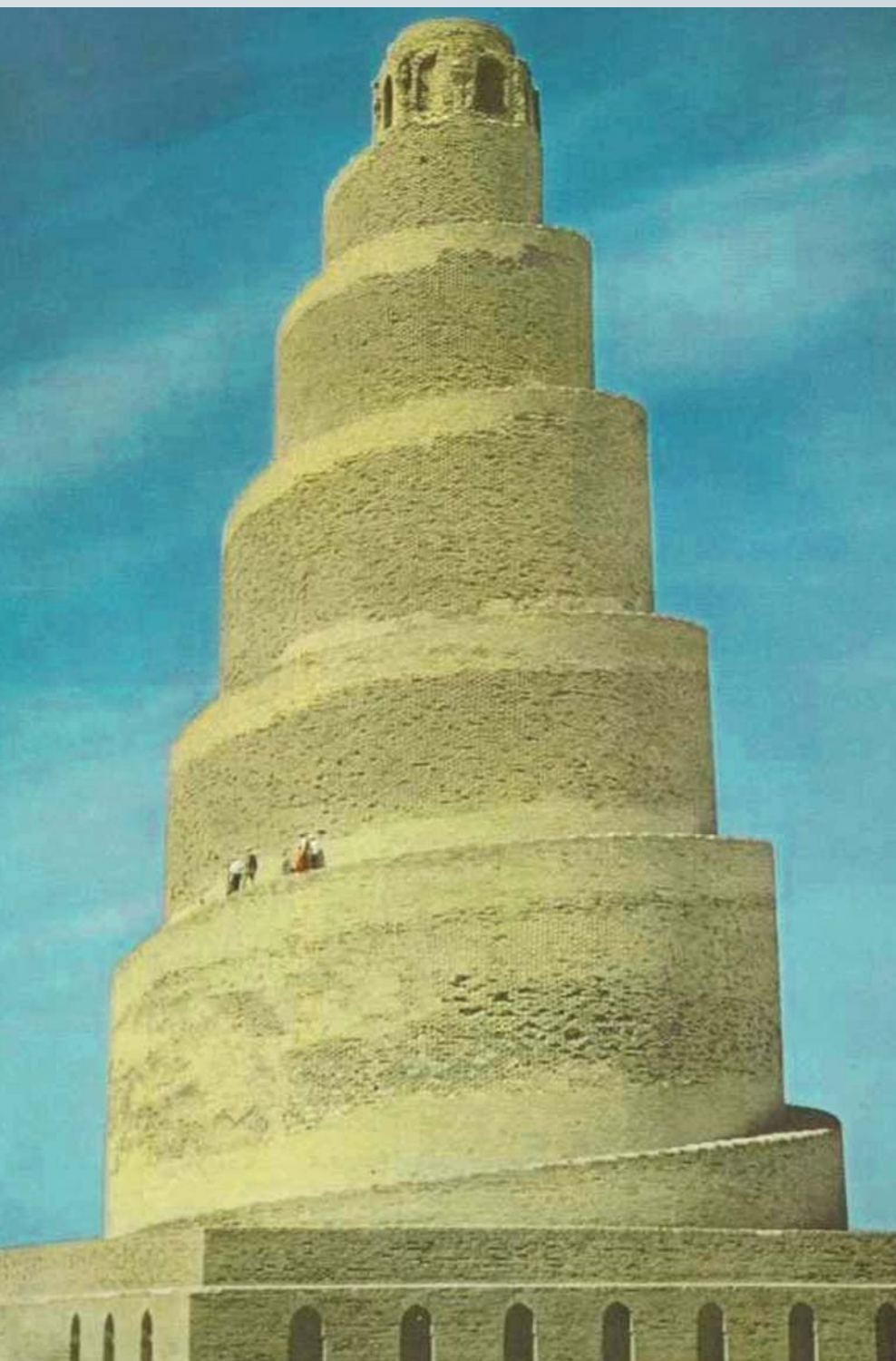
From the *Faces à l'Amé* series by French artist, Benjamin Bini.

International research

The Project 'Humanism in the Age of Globalization – an Intercultural Dialogue about Culture, Humanity and Values' was hosted by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) in Essen, Germany and directed by Jörn Rüsen. The project initiated a dialogue between scholars from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America in order to show that different humanist traditions have existed in different parts of the world, but also that these humanist traditions could become an important inspiration in our contemporary modern world. Although the project concluded officially in 2009, after having received generous financial support from the German Mercator Foundation, publication of the results continues. From 2009 to date a book series by the German publisher Transcript Verlag has published 14 volumes in German and English. The work of the project is being continued in other projects. The project 'Modernity, Critique and Humanism' directed by Oliver Kozlerek with funding from the Mexican *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* (CONACyT) can be seen as an offspring.

The Muslim phase of humanism

Contrary to popular belief, humanism developed within the framework of religious thought – first Greek, then Muslim and finally Christian. In the Golden Age of Islam from the 9th to the 12th centuries, first the Mu'tazili, then the Falasifa explored the limits of humanist thought and the concept of free will in a world dominated by a unique and all-powerful God, anticipating the 18th century encyclopedic approach to knowledge.



MAHMOUD HUSSEIN

Humanism did not arise in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This period, known as the Renaissance, was one period in the long history of humanism, which began two thousand years earlier in Athens and continued during the Golden Age of Islam, from the ninth to the twelfth century.

Renaissance thinkers referred specifically to the legacy of ancient Greece, which they revived and used as a model. But they preferred to overlook the Muslim period of humanism.

Those who make the same mistake today do so because they believe that the humanist approach is, by definition, anti-religious. Yet for most of its history, humanism developed within the framework of religious thought, not outside of it. Neither Leonardo da Vinci,¹ Michelangelo,² Shakespeare,³ Racine,⁴ Descartes⁵ or Newton⁶ ever questioned the power of God.

Humanism objected to *a certain image* of God: the image of an inaccessible God, indifferent to human suffering, who had determined the personal fate of each and every person for eternity. This was the image fostered by the dogma of predestination, according to which men and women have no free will over their lives. Not only does earthly existence have no importance in and of itself—it is only a

📍 The Abu Dulaf mosque in Samarra (Iraq) is one of the most important works of architecture in the Islamic world. It dates from the 9th century. The Samarra archaeological city is inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage

path to heaven—but mankind has no control over its destiny. There is no free will. On the one hand was the absolute power of God; on the other, the absolute powerlessness of mankind.

“We were ... chosen from the beginning,” wrote Saint Paul, “under the predetermined plan of the one who guides all things as he decides by his own will.”⁷ One millennium later, traditionalists and classical theologians of Islam adhered to this same belief; seven centuries after them, Luther⁸ and Calvin⁹ would use the same words. It was against *this concept of the all-powerful divine* that humanism fought.

But how was ancient Greece used as a model for those who, first in the Muslim world and later in the Christian world, would wage the fight against the dogma of predestination?

A perimeter of intellectual freedom

In a context entirely different from that of monotheism, Greece had already confronted this concept of predestination. In their view, the cosmos was a finite space, with a harmonious and hierarchical structure, in which everyone’s place was defined once and for all. Mankind was not at the top of the cosmic structure; gods stood above them. But cosmic laws applied to everyone, gods and men alike.

The latter therefore endured a dual burden: first, the abstract, impersonal, immutable one of the cosmos; and the more personal, familial and capricious constraints of the gods.

Man was powerless against the order of the cosmos; he could only try to navigate his own way. Yet with the gods, who had superhuman powers but were riddled with human frailties, mankind learned how to negotiate, trick and cheat. Ultimately, man discovered that nature operated according to specific laws of the cosmos, which lay beyond the power of the gods, and that men could therefore work to learn and master these laws.

This was the context in which humanism developed. The Greeks invented a new, specifically human environment: the *polis*. Within it, the individual was no longer subject to the traditional power of tribes and clans; citizens were equal before the law and personal merit could prevail over the privilege of birth.

In the democratic city, debate was widespread and speech ruled supreme. To convince others, one had to reason. The principles of abstract logic, valid everywhere and for all, encouraged the exploration of philosophy and mathematics. And with it, man developed powerful leverage over aspects of his life.

Humanism in ancient Greece therefore formed a perimeter of intellectual freedom and efficiency, through which human life—without challenging the overall global order or the power of the gods—became a valued enterprise in and of itself.

Qudra or the power of man

The monotheistic God changed the situation. He not only took over the partial power wielded by the Greek gods, but also the universal cosmic force that applied to these gods as well as to mankind. The abstract, impersonal power of the cosmos was replaced by the omnipotent, personal, creative and active power of God. He became both the One and the All-Powerful.

From this point on, the believer had to explore his own freedom within the orbit of this Almighty. There was no question of pitting the derisory power of man against the infinite power of God. More humbly, it involved cultivating the intellectual, moral and aesthetic realms where human initiative

could be expressed, as distinguished from the will of God, but without challenging His supreme authority.

This realm was conceptualized for the first time in the ninth century in Baghdad, under the Abbasid Caliphate.

Islam was by then an immense, powerful and prosperous empire that encompassed a multitude of different people, religions and cultures. Its capital, Baghdad, had a population of one million, while Rome had 30,000 people, and Lutetia, barely 10,000. In trade, trust was the rule, so that a bill of exchange signed in India was honored as far away as Morocco.

The great caliphs decided to embrace this power and diversity, opting to encourage intelligent thought. They supported efforts to

1. Leonardo da Vinci, [1452-1519], Italian painter, polymath and humanist philosopher.
2. Michelangelo [1475-1564], Italian Renaissance painter, sculptor and architect.
3. William Shakespeare [1564-1616], one of the greatest English playwrights and poets.
4. Jean Racine [1639-1699], classical French playwright.
5. René Descartes [1596-1650], French mathematician and rationalist philosopher.
6. Isaac Newton [1643-1727], English physicist, philosopher and theologian.
7. Epistle to the Ephesians
8. Martin Luther [1483-1546], German priest and father of protestantism.
9. Jean Calvin, [1509-1564], French theologian and scholar, one of the main architects of the Protestant reformation.

📖 Miniature by Al-Mubashshir (Syria) from the early 13th century. It shows Socrates (left) with two of his students



revive ancient knowledge—including secular knowledge drawn from the legacy of Greek science and philosophy, which would soon be translated into Arabic.

This context fostered the development of a theological movement among religious scholars of the period; these were the Mu'tazili, who interpreted the Quran from a viewpoint of rational thought and inquiry.

According to this interpretation, men are distinct creatures, separate from the rest of Creation, due to the fact that God gave them an effective power (*qudra*), once and for all time, by which they can choose to act freely.

This freedom allows them to act as 'God's lieutenants on earth.' During their time on earth, men are not supposed to be self-effacing. Quite the opposite, they are encouraged to be assertive, to display a sense of initiative and to develop their talents, all with the purpose of constructing a fair and united Muslim community.

Within this community, worldly existence is celebrated for its own value. It is recommended, insofar as is possible, to improve the living conditions of others. Beauty is prized, the body is honoured and pleasures are encouraged, within the limits of decency and moderation.

"Allah is He Who made the earth a resting place for you and the sky for a canopy, and fashioned you and perfected your shapes, and hath provided you with good things..." (Quran, Sura 40, verse 64).

On Judgment Day, each person will have to personally answer for the good and the evil they have done during their lifetimes. As God has full knowledge of their actions, He will reward or punish according to a rational and moral justice.

The Mu'tazili approach was supported and even imposed on the religious elite by some of the greatest Abbasid caliphs. But it was so bold and so disturbing that, in the end, most of the traditionalists, jurists and ultimately the theologians themselves would unite against it.

All of them rejected the very idea of a rational interpretation of the acts of God, insofar as this placed limits on His all-mighty power. Divine will is a mystery; it is not subject to any limitation. Hence, while having preordained the destiny of each person, God reserves the privilege of reward and punishment, according to His unfathomable will.

This vision, which fully expressed the dogma of predestination, may seem unjust and immoral. What is required of the believer is not understanding, but rather acceptance and submission to God through an unconditional embrace of total faith. One is then allowed to place one's hopes in divine mercy and compassion.

Precursors of the Encyclopedists

By the late ninth century, the confrontation between the Mu'tazili and the traditionalists was decided in favor of the latter. They not only eliminated the concept of free will, but worked to flush out and combat all the rationalist movements that appeared in Muslim thought.

They specifically targeted the Falasifa (philosophers), who were pursuing an encyclopedic approach that embraced every sphere of knowledge. They redeemed the secular disciplines developed by the Greeks—medicine, mathematics, astronomy and pharmacology—and studied nature as it was, and not as a reflection of the all-powerful divine.

Al-Kindi,¹⁰ al-Farabi,¹¹ Ibn Sina (Avicenna)¹² and Ibn Rushd (Averroes)¹³ developed a new philosophy, through which Aristotelian reason was reconciled with monotheism; it would inspire Maimonides¹⁴ and later, Thomas Aquinas.¹⁵ There is no ontological difference between the truths reached by philosophers and those revealed by God to His prophets. The prophets perceived through instant illumination that which philosophers discovered, step by step, via rational thought.

The Falasifa therefore explored the limits of humanist thought within a monotheistic framework. Adopting the argument of reason over that of authority, even when the latter is based

10. Al-Kindi (Alkindus) [801- 873], one of the greatest Arab philosophers, translator of many Greek manuscripts.

11. Al-Farabi (Alpharabius) [872- 873], Arab polymath and commentator on the works of Plato.

12. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) [980-1037], Persian philosopher, writer, doctor, astronomer and alchemist.

13. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) [1126-1198], Andalusian philosopher, lawyer, mathematician, doctor and Islamic theologian.

14. Moïse Maimonides [1138-1204], doctor, philosopher and Andalusian rabbi.

15. Thomas Aquinas [1224-1274], one of the principal masters of scholastic philosophy and Catholic theology.



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Avicenna as "Principes Abinsceni" with crown and sceptre, woodcut, Venice 1520

on divine revelation, they heralded the encyclopedic approach of the eighteenth century.

The Falasifa had a longer, although less specific influence than that of the Mu'tazili. They were in the forefront for a time in Baghdad, Cordoba and Cairo, but were also eclipsed for long periods. Their doctrinal authority ended with the death of Averroes in the late twelfth century.

In the meantime, the Islamic empire split into two, then three rival empires. Islam suffered major military defeats against the Crusaders around Jerusalem and the Catholic kings in al-Andalus. Soon after, it was devastated by the Mongol invasions.

In various capitals, Islam was undermined by doubt, and power shifted from the hands of cultivated princes to those of military leaders. The confident quest for knowledge was replaced by a cautious defense of well-established beliefs. The concept of free will was lost in the Islamic world. And with it, the significance of a humanist approach.

Yet the works of the Muslim Falasifa, translated from Arabic into Latin, would be taught in every European university. For several centuries, they nourished the great debates that would lead to Renaissance thought. ■

Mahmoud Hussein (Egypt) is a political scientist and Islamic scholar. His latest book (in French), "*Penser le Coran*," is published by Gallimard, Paris: 2011.

The Confucianists honour benevolence, the Mohists universal love, the Taoists compassion, and the Buddhists loving-kindness. As society evolves at high speed, the core values of Chinese civilization can be considered a blueprint for the development of universal harmony and, thus, new humanism.

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“Love” an ink painting on rice paper pasted onto damask paper, by Zhen Ping Qiu. The artist donated this work to UNESCO in 2006, on the 60th anniversary of the Organization. It is reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

For a world of harmony

LIU JI

New humanism is by no means novel but rather a product of the evolutionary path forged by humanity. Its prominent emergence can be linked to George Sarton [1884 – 1956], a renowned Belgian-born American historian of science, who redefined humanism through a scientific lens. He turned to

the origins of science to understand the complexities of human behaviour and advocated a synthesized philosophy of science to bridge the gap between the sciences and humanities, calling it ‘new humanism’.

However, American literary critic Irving Babbitt [1865 – 1933] is largely

considered a founder of the movement. Shocked by a progressively materialistic society in the United States, Babbitt believed Western society had become

Adapted from the speech, “Embrace the Era of New Humanism”, delivered by Liu Ji at the 9th Euro-China Forum on June 27-28 at UNESCO Headquarters.

victim to emotional and individualistic instincts and thus campaigned for self-restraint. An opponent of Romanticism, his key principles conflicted with the intellectual trend of his time and were deemed controversial, yet sparked a great philosophical debate, which shaped conservative intellectual thinking post-World War II.

Babbitt's humanistic philosophy entered China's political and literary consciousness through numerous Chinese scholars who studied with him at Harvard University. Inspired by Buddhist and Confucian values, Babbitt appealed culturally to his students who later adapted new humanism locally as a counter-reaction to the May 4th movement, which called for a rejection of Chinese traditional values, Marxism and radical beliefs.

Virtue, affection and harmony

The practices of Chinese ancient culture can be considered a blueprint for the development of new humanism. Specifically, *The Book of Changes* (also known as the *I Ching*), one of China's oldest classic texts, said to have been written by Emperor Fu Hsi (2953-2838 B.C.). It focuses on the balance of opposites and the inevitability of change. According to this text, "By observing the ornaments

conscience to normalize social behaviour. In contrast, Western civilization regulates social behaviour by external powers based on scientific reasoning, hence the rule of law.

The dichotomy between Western and Chinese civilizations is much like the two hemispheres of the human brain: the logical left side and the emotional right side. Only when these two hemispheres are mobilized simultaneously can their full potential be realized. Thus, logic and affection should be combined together to give a full-scale representation of new humanism.

Chinese people attach extreme importance to "the debt of gratitude" they owe others, repaying debt at any price.

They hold family affection sacred, and try to avoid public conflict like suing relatives. However, the challenge is to simultaneously attain loyalty to the nation and filial piety, which is the respect a child should show his or her parents.

Harmony instils "good-tempered" individual behaviour in Chinese social order. Families believe that if they live in harmony, they will prosper. Business etiquette is based on the notion that "harmony brings wealth." In country governance, harmony is the ultimate

The dichotomy between Western and Chinese civilizations is much like the two hemispheres of the human brain: the logical left side and the emotional right side. Only when these two hemispheres are mobilized simultaneously can their full potential be realized. Thus, logic and affection should be combined together to give a full-scale representation of new humanism.

of the sky, we may understand the principle of the transformation of the four seasons; by observing ethical human relations and teaching the common people, we may transform social traditions for the better." Thus, we should observe human nature to learn how to improve it, and in doing so, follow the fundamental values of Chinese culture such as virtue, affection, harmony and love.

Throughout China's long civilization, virtue, both personal and social, has guided people in their day-to-day living, relying on one's inner

pursuit, whereas Western society believes in the "survival of the fittest" and 'a law of the jungle' where "the weak are the prey of the strong."

Harmony also encompasses the ideal relationship of oneness between man and nature, whereby man is an inherent part of nature and thus should act according to natural laws.

The Confucianists pay tribute to benevolence, the Mohists to universal love, the Taoists to compassion, and the Buddhists to loving-kindness. Love seems to be an omnipresent topic for all schools of thought in China.

Confucian roots of humanism

The great Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC) described benevolence as "loving people"; "You yourself desire rank and standing, then help others get rank and standing," he said. "You want to turn your own merits to account, then help others to turn theirs to account."

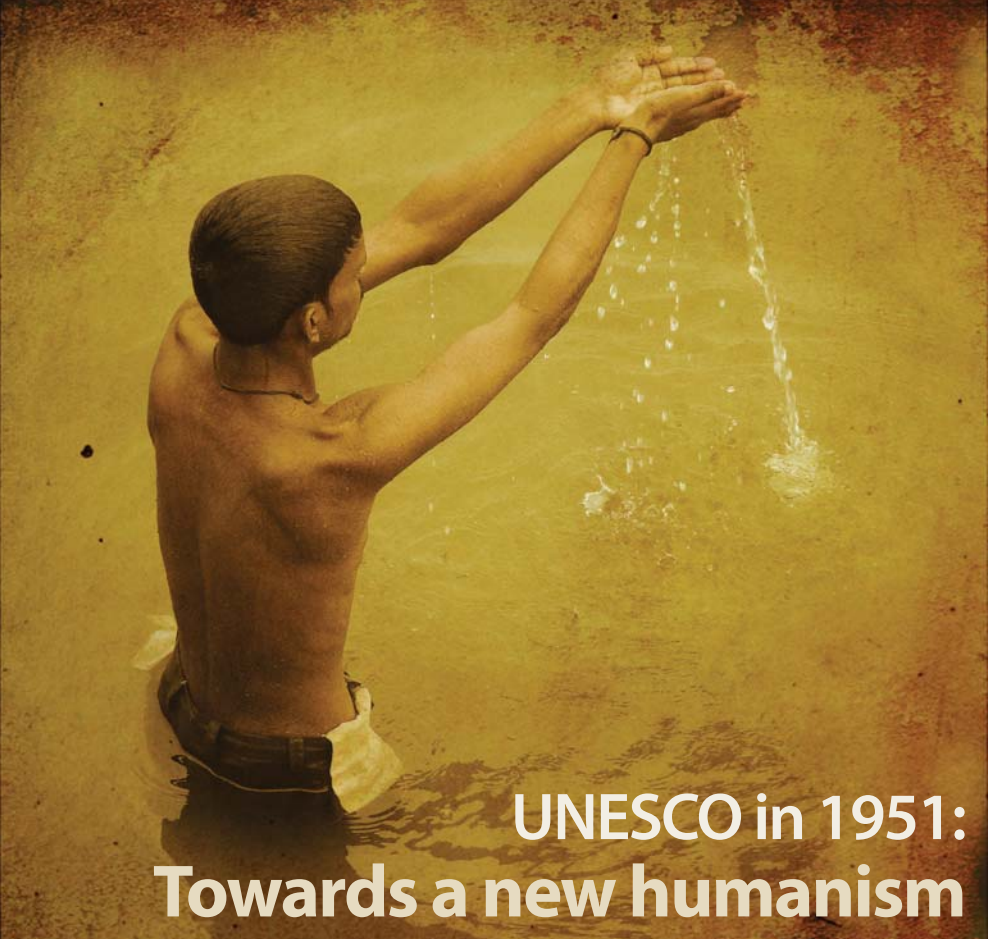
For Confucianists, the ultimate goal is to develop a world of universal harmony where people love all equally. As a result, those who are less fortunate in society, the aged, orphans and people with disabilities would be supported by the community. Material resources would be used for goodwill, and social wealth owned and shared by all.

According to notable Confucianist, Meng Ke, known as Mencius [372 - 289 BC), man possesses four initial senses just as he possesses four limbs. "The sense of compassion is the beginning of benevolence; the sense of shame the beginning of righteousness; the sense of modesty the beginning of decorum; the sense of right and wrong the beginning of wisdom." These four senses differentiate man from animal, and only with their integrated development can man really be considered human.

The doctrines of Confucius and Mencius have been the cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture for thousands of years and are still dominant today. According to some thinkers, it is under the influence of Confucianism that the Enlightenment philosophers of the 18th century constructed the monumental Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789.

Thus, the substance of new humanism can only be enriched with the ingredients of Chinese culture. As human society evolves at high speed, the construction of a harmonious world, which has long been the universal ideal of mankind, calls for the rise of new humanism. ■

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UNESCO in 1951: Towards a new humanism

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Sixty years ago, UNESCO held a 'Discussion on the Cultural and Philosophical Relations Between East and West' in New Delhi, the capital of India, which endorsed the idea of a new holistic humanism. Here we are publishing extracts from the discussion document submitted by participants, under the title 'Towards a new Humanism'. At the time, Asian nations were gaining independence, while the world was still suffering the aftermath of the Second World War. The first steps in this humanist project, supported by UNESCO, aimed to bring Eastern and Western cultures closer together.

[...] What Western man has, for four centuries, been calling humanism is the ambition to achieve mastery over himself and the universe by the exercise of his intellect in isolation from the rest of his being. [...] What it has called the dominion of the complete man is the contemplation of the entire world by a man reduced to a part of himself. We must abandon this error if we are to repair humanism and expand it.

Certainly not to destroy it, nor, as we have said, to renounce the conquests of science, which are, after all, positive achievements of the same spirit. For a certain time and in certain places, Western humanism has been the sphere for human accomplishments that are of inherently outstanding value. But we can no longer allow it to be exclusive [...] If the word *humanism* is the name we have to give to the home of human genius, humanism does not date from the 16th century; its only and permanent home is not Mediterranean Europe; its sole source is not a certain idea of Classical Greek and Roman antiquity [...]. On the other hand, when modern Western humanism is put squarely back within the limits that need to be imposed on it, the crisis that it is currently facing comes as no surprise, and is not a hopeless disaster. This adversity would only be absolute if one

were to insist on taking the pre-eminence of human reason as absolute. But man's excessive and outmoded pretensions today are to a total awareness of his own truth and energy.

After four centuries of striving to dissociate all things by means of analysis, starting with himself, he is coming back to a synthetic view of the person, revived by the soul. As a consequence, all values, everywhere in the world, and from all periods of world history, not only find their use, but also their order and hierarchy. Whether these values have their origins in the East or West, they are no longer rivals, but are all converging towards this new humanism, with its tendency towards universalism arising from a real inner impulse, and no longer from some questionable aspiration [...]

But the impulse that is needed today is to liberate the human spirit from the bonds by which Western thinking has held it captive for so long. The new humanism will be one where the methods of leadership and labour that the Western intellect has been able to acquire will be applied to the rediscovery of spiritual domains that have long been deserted. So, instead of the intellect leading man to run the risks that arise from his presumptions and usurpations, it will need all the vivacity and strength it can muster, this time to serve the cause of the truly complete man – not the man steered off course into the material world by his intellect, but a man with body and soul united, using his mind to confront his own mystery.

We believe that if this latter humanism were to develop, East and West would see the disappearance of much that separates them, and the appearance of all that unites them and that unites all mankind [...]

The full text of the document, written by the French writer, André Rousseaux, can be found in UNESCO's digital archives (in French only): www.unesco.org/new/unesco/resources/publications/unesdoc-database/

Humanizing globalization

Making use of the 'envisioning force' of the law to forge a form of legal humanism that is both pluralistic and open, in areas as diverse as lasting peace, global warming or the regulation of new digital and biomedical technologies – in these times of rampant globalization, this is the credo of the French lawyer, Mireille Delmas-Marty.

MIREILLE DELMAS-MARTY
interviewed by Jasmina Šopova

Are legal systems becoming progressively more humanized with globalization, or are they staying much the same?

At first sight, legal humanism seems to be gaining in strength with the multiplication of legal instruments and international bodies monitoring the observance of human rights, as well as through the appearance of humanitarian law and the emergence of universally applicable criminal justice. And in terms of the economy, the global market should create jobs and increase prosperity.

So, on the surface, everything seems to be for the better, in the best of worlds... But globalization acts like a kind of magnifying glass and is revealing a series of contradictions, raising a whole host of questions. How can we reconcile the concept of security with the principle of freedom? Economic rights and protection of the environment, etc? Globalization can even makes the situation worse when, for example, it separates already globalized rights such as economic rights, from social rights, which are the preserve of States, themselves weakened by constraints imposed by financial markets. We could even

➔ Work by the artist Najah Zarbout (Tunisia)
www.najahzarbout.blogspot.com



© Najah Zarbout

wonder if there is not a contradiction between the universalism laid down by the 1948 Declaration on Human Rights and the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression, which qualifies cultural expression as the common heritage of mankind.

How do these contradictions translate into reality?

One of the most marked contradictions concerns migration. Borders are open for trade and capital but closed to human beings. The trend is even towards a tightening of control and repression in many countries, to the point of merging immigration and crime together. But, by opening their borders to the global market, these

same countries destabilize local markets and encourage people to leave. Basically, the same players are simultaneously manufacturing immigration and repressing it.

At the same time, the dissociation of economic and social rights restricts growth to economic and monetary profit, while doing nothing to limit increasing vulnerability and social exclusion, whether in terms of unemployment or poverty. As prosperity increases, the gap between the highest and lowest incomes widens.

Finally, multinational companies are often a driving force in the natural resources sector and are behind a large number of conflicts across the world, notably in Africa and Latin America. This is why war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression continue, despite the creation of an International Criminal Court (ICC).² It is true that it only came into force relatively recently (2002), but there are also structural reasons – the statutes of the ICC do not cover the responsibility of legal persons,³ and so enterprises go unpunished when they commit a crime. This undermines the dissuasive role of the ICC, which was written into its statutes. Unlike *ad hoc* tribunals, which judge crimes already committed, the ICC sits permanently.

And what of the contradictions between economic rights and environmental rights?

The imperative for development and competitiveness is discouraging States from taking action to protect the environment. And this raises the question of how best to protect the planet against the negative effects of climate change, declining biodiversity or water pollution (see pp. 34-35). While industrialized countries are aligning their own commitments to those of developing or emerging countries, these latter countries are invoking the notion of historical equity – if industrialized countries were originally responsible for the pollution of our planet, they now need to join in the general effort to preserve the environment, while allowing others to develop. The expression 'sustainable development' is supposed to stimulate synergy between economic rights and environmental rights, but so long as

the notion of equitable development has not been integrated, this synergy will remain an illusion.

By modifying man's fate, aren't new technologies adding to the paradoxes?

Technologies have always been 'new'. What has changed is the rate at which innovations are being made. So, for digital technologies, French law is unable to keep pace. By the time the Constitutional Council has given its ruling on a law, actual practice has already moved on and escapes the legislation!

Information technologies can help strengthen democracy, as we have seen recently in certain Arab countries, but, at the same time, they encourage a move towards a surveillance society.

This ambivalence is equally marked in the field of biotechnology, which can be used to counteract sterility, through artificial procreation, as well as to select embryos using pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, thus moving towards eugenics, which is considered a crime.

The widespread use of such practices would reduce the randomness of genetic selection – the element of chance – and thus the biological diversity of human beings. And this is where the paradox arises – in the name of individual liberty (being in control of one's body and one's offspring), our societies run the risk of provoking a kind of artificial shaping of the human species (see pp. 39-40).

Another paradox is that the more we come to depend on digital technologies, the more we lose our autonomy; yet at the same time we are making increasingly autonomous robots. Robots can help the elderly and the sick and contribute to general wellbeing. But in both the USA and France, programmes have been launched to develop robots to replace flesh and blood soldiers to carry out 'clean wars' and reach military objectives without harming civilians. This would mean entering ethical rules into the robot's programme, with all the risks of error involved in interpreting such a programme. The most important ethical choices are extremely subtle and difficult to anticipate with mathematical precision.



All of these examples demonstrate a process of dehumanization. What can the law do?

Its role is difficult because, in a world of accelerating change, we cannot return to a static concept that we might call 'legal humanism', but need to establish more dynamic processes of humanization. Rather than repeatedly affirming principles, we need to try to reverse the movement towards dehumanization in reality. Only through the effective upholding of human rights can we avoid some of the aberrations of totalitarian politics, such as market totalitarianism, notably in the financial market.

What resources does the law have?

The law does not offer a response to each of the challenges I have mentioned. But certain current legal processes do offer the beginnings of a response in order to humanize globalization. For example, to create a multi-tiered form of citizenship – it is a slow and difficult process, but it does respond to problems of immigration as well as to those of the environment.

The idea of global citizenship is a dream that dates back to Antiquity. But more recently, in the Germany of the late 18th century, Emmanuel Kant dreamed of perpetual peace between nations,⁴ just as, Kang Youwei,⁵ in China, dreamed of the age of great world peace at the end of the 19th century.

This 'Dream of the two Ks' could gradually become reality. We are already seeing that the creation of European citizenship tends to complement national citizenship, rather than undermine it. And on a planetary scale the Global Forum on Migration and Development⁶ is gradually instigating a global approach, integrating a concern for humanization alongside economic constraints. While we wait for the emigration countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers (signed in 1990!), we can see the beginnings of a process of recognition of certain rights that foreshadows global citizenship.

It is by looking towards the future, to global risks, that we begin to see humanity as a community with a shared fate. But it is only by referring back to the history of humanity that UNESCO can help to establish, disseminate and construct intercultural forms of

citizenship – that is intercultural rather than multicultural, since it is not enough to juxtapose cultures, but important to aim for the more ambitious objective of reciprocal humanism (see pp. 14-16).

Is it utopian to imagine global governance founded on humanist principles?

At present it is still utopian. The unequal distribution of power, shared between a few States and multinational corporations, renders the organization of this kind of global governance extremely difficult. In cases where human rights are violated we need to be able to hold all those in power to account. For States, this kind of process is beginning to operate within the Council of Europe (with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Court on Human Rights in Strasbourg), as well as in Latin America (with the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights not having been ratified by Canada and the USA) and more recently in Africa (with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights). In the absence of a World Court of Human Rights less restrictive mechanisms are being established, but they are inadequate and scattered.

And multinational corporations?

So-called 'social' responsibility is limited to a few small islands of *hard law*⁷ in an ocean of *soft law* (guiding principles, codes of conduct, etc). In the case of serious violations, the countries where the multinational firms are established

have neither the means nor the will to pursue them, for fear of losing the jobs they provide. And the parent countries are rarely competent (and do not wish to be) to pursue deeds committed abroad against foreign victims.

There is a very old text (*Alien Tort Claims Act*, 1789) that empowers the federal legal system in the USA to prosecute anyone who has violated human rights, even abroad and against foreigners, which has been used recently against multinationals. But sentences are rare. And, in fact, I am not in favour of this principle of 'universal competence' if it transforms superpowers into judges presiding over the whole world. In the absence of a world court, we will soon need an international convention which, when multinationals violate human rights, assigns competence to the parent country and, if this country does not prosecute the perpetrator, would provide the country in which the corporation is established with the resources (in terms of personnel and logistics) to take the matter to court.

Could such a case not be referred to the International Criminal Court?

Even if we were to extend its range of competence to include corporate bodies, the multinationals would only be judged for the most serious crimes – such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, etc. On the other hand, the ICC can prosecute an incumbent Head of State, which is something of a political as well as a legal revolution. Unfortunately, without a police force, it has no means to



make an arrest. At present it appeals to States, as well as UN and NATO forces, to cooperate, but with very unsatisfactory results. The link between the law and the forces of order still needs to be organized on a global scale.

And the links between the law and peace?

Ordinarily, lasting peace is not considered possible if justice has not previously been seen to be done. But examples like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission show that peace can be re-established without all the criminals being brought to justice, but just those who refuse to recognize their guilt. And in this respect, the developed world has probably a great deal to learn from Africa if it is to avoid what I call 'legal fundamentalism', which, like religious fundamentalism, means limiting and rejecting any plurality of interpretations. The exigency of the law has to be reconciled with the need for peace. And the refusal to let the guilty go unpunished must not itself become overly rigid.

What do you think about our responsibility vis-à-vis future generations, which is already written into the French Charter on the Environment?

It is true that references to future generations are beginning to appear in legal texts, especially this charter, which

has constitutional validity. In practice, a certain amount of imagination is needed to introduce future generations into the law. Who can represent their interests? What is one responsible for and for how long? How can we compensate those who have not yet been born? etc. I personally am reluctant to speak about the 'rights' of future generations, or the 'rights' of nature or animals, because there can be no reciprocity. But as responsible beings, humans do have duties towards their future descendants, and indeed towards non-human living beings.

But we still need to be careful, because, for a long time, the notion of 'human duties' was part of the argument used to legalize State tyranny, whereas the expression 'human rights', when attached to States, enables limits to be placed on the abuse of power, and to make it possible to 'rationalize' the reasons (or lack of reasons) of State. On the other hand, when relations are not reciprocal, duties still need to be recognized. The right balance has to be found, because the duties that we have with respect to future generations must not obliterate the rights of present generations.

🔗 "Borders are open for trade and capital but closed to human beings," says Mireille Delmas-Marty. This idea is illustrated in the "New World Climax" installation by Cameroonian artist, Berthélémy Togo.

Both generations are concerned about the dangers arising from technological innovations, which you have cited as one of the challenges facing modern humanism.

We obviously cannot ban all technological innovation. That would be absurd, given that throughout history, mankind has become humanized by developing technologies and globalizing them. We globalized the wheel, then the wheel-barrow, the compass, etc. But this does not mean that just because something is possible it should be allowed (as innovations are unavoidable, it would be pointless to resist them). It is therefore important to adapt the legal responses to technological innovations. Relations between scientists and politicians also need to be revised – between knowledge and power – because there is also a gap in global governance there. States defend national interests, corporate and private interests, and, apart from a few international organizations with few means of action, no one is responsible for defending the general interest. Experts fill the gap. In principle, they do not have the power to make decisions but in practice they often play a key role regarding scientific innovations and their applications. While expertise still has no global status, various scattered bodies are beginning to guarantee the independence and impartiality of experts in order to avoid conflicts of interest.



© Laurent Goldstein/La Collection

1. *La Force imaginante* is the title of a book by Mireille Delmas-Marty not yet available in English
2. Established by the Rome Convention of 17 July 1998, the International Criminal Court, which entered into force in July 2002, is the first permanent court set up to judge, according to its preamble, the perpetrators of "...unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity."
3. A legal person (*persona ficta*) is an entity, other than a natural (human) person, with a legal existence and, as such, has rights and responsibilities.
4. In a 1795 text, *Zum Ewigen Frieden (Perpetual Peace)*, Kant summarized Enlightenment thinking on peace and the idea of the federation of free nations.
5. Kang Youwei, *Datong Shu*, trad. L.G Thompson, *The One World Philosophy of K'angYu-wei*, London, 1958.
6. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), which held its first meeting in Brussels in 2007, is a platform for exchanging practices and experiences in an attempt to define the means to use international migration to best effect for development and to reduce its negative effects.
7. Hard law refers to a traditional form of law, while soft law is a norm that is not legally binding.



Portrait of Mireille Delmas-Marty by Emmanuelle Marchadour.

But adapting the law to encompass practices arising from new technologies, or trying to anticipate the risks to come, is not enough...

Quite true. Ambivalences also have to be taken into account. Technologies engender dehumanizing effects, like the emergence of a surveillance society or shaping of the species, which we need to resist if we are not to lose what we have gained from humanization, on the grounds that globalization would wipe out the history of all peoples.

What would be the components of this human community of values?

It is hard to tell in advance. They gradually emerge through reciprocal humanization, as cultures intermingle. Even the notion of human dignity, which we might think has been defined once and for all, still needs to be consolidated, especially regarding the status of women.

Even so, the list of crimes against humanity, or prohibitions like torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, implicitly allow the common components of humanity to appear, such as the uniqueness of every individual and their equal membership of the human community. And the risks created by new technologies suggest that a third component needs to be added – indeterminism. Human beings are not determined in advance, this is their share of freedom and the basis for their responsibility.

It is by referring to these three components that the law could play its real role – to resist, to render responsible and to anticipate. Resisting dehumanization, holding those who hold the reins of global power responsible for their acts, thinking ahead about future risks. This could be the instrument for a new form of humanism, which would not be a fixed dogma but conceived as a dynamic process of humanizing practices. ■

Elected member of the French Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques in 2007, **Mireille Delmas-Marty** (France) has, since 2002, been chair of 'Comparative legal studies and the internationalization of law' at the Collège de France where her course on 'Sense and nonsense in legal humanism' questions the humanization of legal systems, at a time when it seems more than ever necessary. She is the author of several seminal books, some of which have been translated into English, including *Towards a Truly Common Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *Ordering Pluralism* (Hart Publishing, 2009). She is noted for her monumental work comprising several volumes, entitled *La Force imaginante* (Seuil), the latest volume of which will be published in 2012.

The notion of humanism is evolving, apace with scientific discoveries and political developments. In this digital age, technologies are increasing the opportunities of the hybridization of cultures, but also encouraging the advent of democracy and the emergence of a universal form of humanism.

MILAD DOUEIHI

The global nature of communications and what we have chosen to call the 'information society' are inviting anthropologists to rethink, at least partially, the basic matter and categories of their discipline – forms of exchange and the ways in which social links are woven.

For the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss [1908-2009], anthropology is not only a humanist discipline, but also the product of forms of humanism that have left a mark on history and the development of Western societies. As early as 1956, in a document written for UNESCO,¹ he identified three forms of humanism in conclusion to his analyses of the relationships between the sciences and social sciences: Renaissance humanism, with its roots in the rediscovery of classical antiquity texts; exotic humanism, associated with the knowledge of Eastern and Far Eastern cultures; and democratic humanism, associated with an anthropology that embraces all the activities of human societies.

These three forms of humanism, it should be pointed out, are linked to discoveries of texts, oral traditions or other expressions of culture, which opened up new fields of investigation and allowed the development of new critical methods and, as a result, new knowledge. In the case of Renaissance humanism, it was the knowledge of



© 'Flux' an interactive video installation by Belgian artist, Thomas Israël in the entrance hall of the International Youth Office in Brussels (Belgium)

DIGITAL humanism?

© Thomas Israël

Greek and Latin, an awareness of history and an internal critique that undermined the authority of an institution as powerful as the Church. For exotic humanism, the meeting of East and West encouraged comparativism, which in turn gave rise to new sciences and disciplines, like linguistics. And the humanism that embraced all human societies gave rise, among other things, to the structural methodology. This enabled Lévi-Strauss, in particular, to observe the world in its globality and to discover an order underlying the diversity of forms of social organization and manifestations of culture. For the father of structuralism, this order was a mark of the human mind.

Digital humanism is the result of a totally new convergence between our complex cultural heritage and a technique that has become a space for unprecedented sociability.

It is also worth remembering that these three forms of humanism correspond to political developments: the first was aristocratic, limited to a

privileged few; the second was bourgeois, because it accompanied Western industrial development; and the third, democratic, as it excluded no one.

It is this universal dimension that urges me, in all modesty, to propose a fourth humanism, digital humanism.

The fourth humanism

Digital humanism is the result of a totally new convergence between our complex, cultural heritage and a technology that has become a space for unprecedented sociability. This convergence is new in the sense that it redistributes concepts and objects, as well as the practices associated with them, within a virtual environment.

And, like the three forms of humanism defined by Lévi-Strauss, digital humanism is linked to a major discovery that opened multiple fields of investigation – the new technologies, which are overturning established socio-cultural categories.

Besides its technical and economic aspects, which need constant scrutiny and questioning, digital technology is in the process of becoming a *culture*, in the sense that it is changing our view of objects, relations and values, and that it is introducing new perspectives into the field of human activity.

Cultural practices like writing, reading or communication, for example, have continually been subject to transformation since the arrival of digital technologies. As the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss [1872-1950] pointed out, technology can play an essential role, when access to the technical instruments not only modifies individual behaviour, but also the entire surrounding culture.

Digital technologies can play an even more essential role by radically changing categories of space and time, thus facilitating meetings between cultures and their hybridization – through the elimination of frontiers and geographical distances, the immediacy of communication, etc.

Of course, they have their limitations – digital technologies have been based on mainly Western socio-cultural models; they have not managed to overcome linguistic barriers, and they are not immune to abuse. Also, their global distribution is unequal, which can exaggerate inequalities between rich and poor.

But despite this, digital technologies have become a global reality, a universal means of communication, even an instrument for democratisation, as we saw in the Arab Spring at the beginning of 2011.

The hybrid space of the digital culture is a new way of “living together”, with its myths, discoveries and utopias. It makes the global village a reality. Digital humanism is one way of thinking about this new reality. ■

Milad Doueïhi (USA) is a religious historian and Chair of Research on Digital Cultures at Laval University (Quebec). He is the author of several books, including *Digital Cultures* (Harvard University Press, 2011) and *A Perverse History of the Human Heart* (Harvard University Press, 1998)

1. “How the social sciences have humanised technical civilisation,” a document dated 8 August 1956, first published in the *UNESCO Courier* n° 2008-5, ‘Claude Lévi-Strauss: the view from afar.’ Available in the digital archives of the *Courier*: www.unesco.org/en/courier

Welcome to the Anthropocene

Since the industrial revolution, technological innovation has been freeing mankind from many of the bonds that link it to the rest of Nature. But this supposed progress could have a tragic ending. Climate change is now showing us that it is time we stopped behaving like strangers in our own ecological niche.

RUTH IRWIN

Apocalypse scenarios crop up often in our modern civilization. We have seen economically driven famines, wars over gold, oil and diamonds. There are threats of imminent ecological disaster and global nuclear war. Civilizations have disappeared in the past and ours could also come to an end. Now climate change, like nuclear winter, joins the growing list of potential disasters that could tip mankind towards calamity.

Unlike nuclear war, the agency that triggers climate change is not clear-cut. Science has 'very high confidence' that the changes occurring in the atmosphere are a result of human industrial activity, pumping billions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the lower atmosphere for the past 150 years.¹

No single individual has triggered climate change, any more than one individual – not even an individual State – is in a position to halt the industrial technologies of modernity. It is true that consumer decisions on a mass scale could alter the way corporations produce goods and services and this could, in turn, have an impact on climate change. But, more fundamentally, to cope adequately with climate change, the very role of 'consumer' needs to be transformed.

Individuals can and do lead very ecologically friendly lifestyles. But they soon realize how hard it is when the community as a whole is not designed to have a light ecological footprint.² Ancient cities in Europe and the Middle East are much easier to walk around

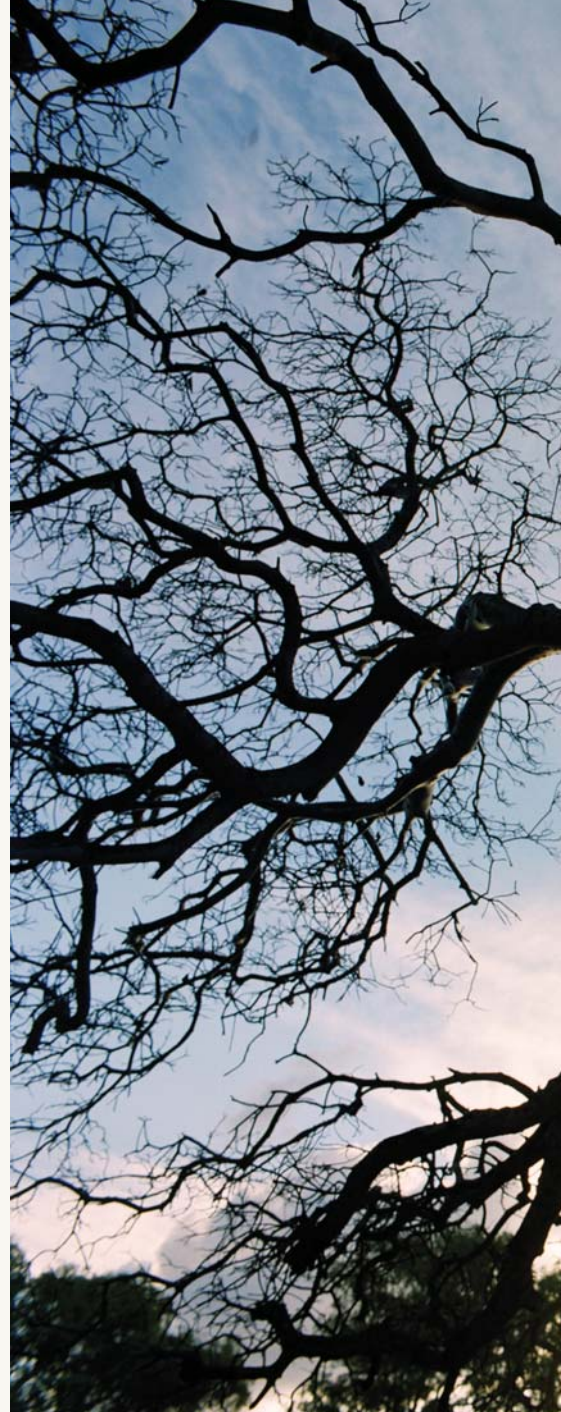
than the densely populated, sprawling concrete jungles of the New World, where public transport is a much more effective way to get around. But in the low-density suburban sprawl, if public transport is not well organized, the car is still king.

In the end, then, it is up to our political leaders to make the right decisions. Yet, on an international scale – the scale on which our future is being played out – there is an evident lack of leadership. Every year in the international conferences on climate change that have been held since 1995, our political leaders have failed to challenge the technological norms that prevail in modern societies.

For me, the reasons that those in leadership positions find it so difficult to challenge the status quo lie in the twin apparatus of modern technology and global economics, which are central to modern civilisation. And we are all struggling with this. To transform them seems impossible, tantamount to changing civilizations, shifting from one ecological epoch to another. But, according to the Royal Society of Great Britain, we have already done just that.

In 2010 this venerable body officially declared that the planet has shifted from the temperate, placid, Holocene epoch – which lasted for over 10,000 years, and saw the development of agricultural and urban civilizations – to the turbulent and probably catastrophic Anthropocene epoch, influenced by man's activities (from the Greek, *anthropos*: human).

The shift had undoubtedly begun much earlier, at least by 1945 (with our entry into the nuclear era) and, more



Maputo, Mozambique.

likely, towards the end of the 18th century, when the Industrial Revolution significantly changed the way people relate to their local ecosystems.

Damaged links between man and nature

Post-industrial technologies have given modern man the feeling that he is free from the bonds that link him to the rest

1. Climate change 2007, IPCC report

2. The ecological footprint is a measure of the amount of land needed to fill the needs of an individual (or population) according to his lifestyle: consumption versus regeneration.

3. Workers' movement at the beginning of the 19th century in England led by Ned Ludd, which turned into the massive destruction of machinery, seen as the main cause of unemployment.



© Alfredo D'Amato/Panos Pictures

of Nature. In cities, we are no longer dependent on local seasonal produce. Thanks to refrigerated transport and storage, people living in urban areas can import food stuffs and other goods from far afield, compared to a ten kilometres or so walking distance in the 18th century. We will not die of hunger if the crops fail, as we would have in the past – and this has changed the relationship of city-dwellers to their local ecology. We may even be unaware of floods and droughts in surrounding rural areas, or where our drinking water comes from, or how healthy our forests are. And, as the proportion of global population living in urban areas grows, cities are continuing to spread into the surrounding countryside, with a

constellation of technological and economic necessities, rather than public need, dictating how they are built.

The physical shape of our cities, our modes of agriculture, mining, energy production, forestry, fishing and commerce have all changed radically in the space of a century and a half, transforming the way much of the world now looks.

Our communities have become so embedded in the tempo and expectations of modern technological innovations that these are even shaping our understanding of ourselves as 'individuals', as humans, while narrowing our view of the Earth, rendering it increasingly remote.

Globalization – the new ecology?

While there has been a long tradition of small groups of ecologically mindful people, their impact on the norms of modern life has been limited. Individual ethics has meant little to the juggernaut of modern progress. But climate change has brought the scale of modern industrial technology and its by-product of greenhouse gas emissions into global consciousness in an unprecedented way.

The Anthropocene epoch may become one of the planet's major extinction periods, similar to when the dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago. For the first time, we can see clearly the impacts of modern technological progress on ecology at a global, planetary scale - unless something radical shifts.

But this shift is slow in coming. International schemes for trading greenhouse gas emissions, for example, show just how little the real scale of ecological realities is being taken into account.

This is not a Luddite, anti-technological position.³ But we can no longer remain strangers in our own ecological niche. Modernity is global in scope, and our ecological niche has become global too. Climate change makes it clear that ecological boundary conditions need to be taken seriously. Gone are the days when the human imagination is free to construct an ideal reality. Human activities, technologies and economics need to be appropriate for the harsh realities of ecological conditions.

The awareness of planetary ecology that climate change has awakened in us should force us to shift the normative lens through which we comprehend the world. We can do nothing without strong political decisions on an international scale. Perhaps globalization can also be seen as the 'new Green.' ■

Ruth Irwin is Senior Lecturer in Business Ethics at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. She is the author of *Heidegger, Politics and Climate Change (2008)* and Editor of *Climate Change and Philosophy: Transformational Possibilities (2010)*, both published by Continuum, London.

Dreams of science

Because of the power it bestows on those who practice it and apply its results to the real world, science feeds our hope that planning and organizing can drive human evolution to a higher plane. This has often proved a dangerous quest.

MICHAL MEYER

After Victor Frankenstein's Monster escaped from the laboratory he went on a rampage of murder and mayhem. Yet the Monster had potential for good: He craved friendship and love and he helped a starving family.

Mary Shelley's¹ famous tale is at least in part the story of responsibility abandoned. Victor Frankenstein, scientist, had wished to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world," but had ended by forsaking all moral responsibility for his creation, which he abandons in the hope he will forget about what he has wrought. Out of that theme has come a long list of Hollywood mad scientists who seek power by fleeing from responsibility.

Science (and technology) is power over the world, and increasingly power over our biological selves. The combination of science and humanism aims to harness science for the betterment of humanity. Yet we tend to forget that using science to better the world is a project as old as science itself. How we use science in the real world of today brings up questions of meaning, values, and responsibility.

Science and human identity

Take, for example, the case of transhumanism, which focuses on individual rather than societal improvement. Transhumanism is future oriented and relies on technologies both new and as yet confined to the pages of science fiction books. Its ultimate goal is to transcend human biological limitations and so create a technologically based immortality. While transhumanism's technological origins lie in post World War II cybernetics, nanotechnology, and genetic engineering, its essence connects to the ancient alchemical quest to create the Philosopher's Stone, which supposedly provided near immortality to those alchemical adepts clever enough to create it.

Transhumanism ranges from the currently realistic to the futuristically surreal, from stem cell therapy to the uploading of human consciousness into machines—at which point it morphs into a strange religious hybrid. Transhumanist British thinker Max More writes that transhumanism is a "blanket



📍 'Sparkle Man'. Group F. Firework display.
www.groupef.com
© Danica Bijeljic

imagination emerged towards the end of the 19th century. In the United States a potent brew of cultural fears – high immigration, cities as hotbeds of depravity, evolution and degeneration – intersected with the scientific knowledge of the day to create eugenics.

The goal of the eugenicists was to put science into the service of bettering the human stock, and, indeed, some appeared to regard humans as similar to livestock when it came to avoiding

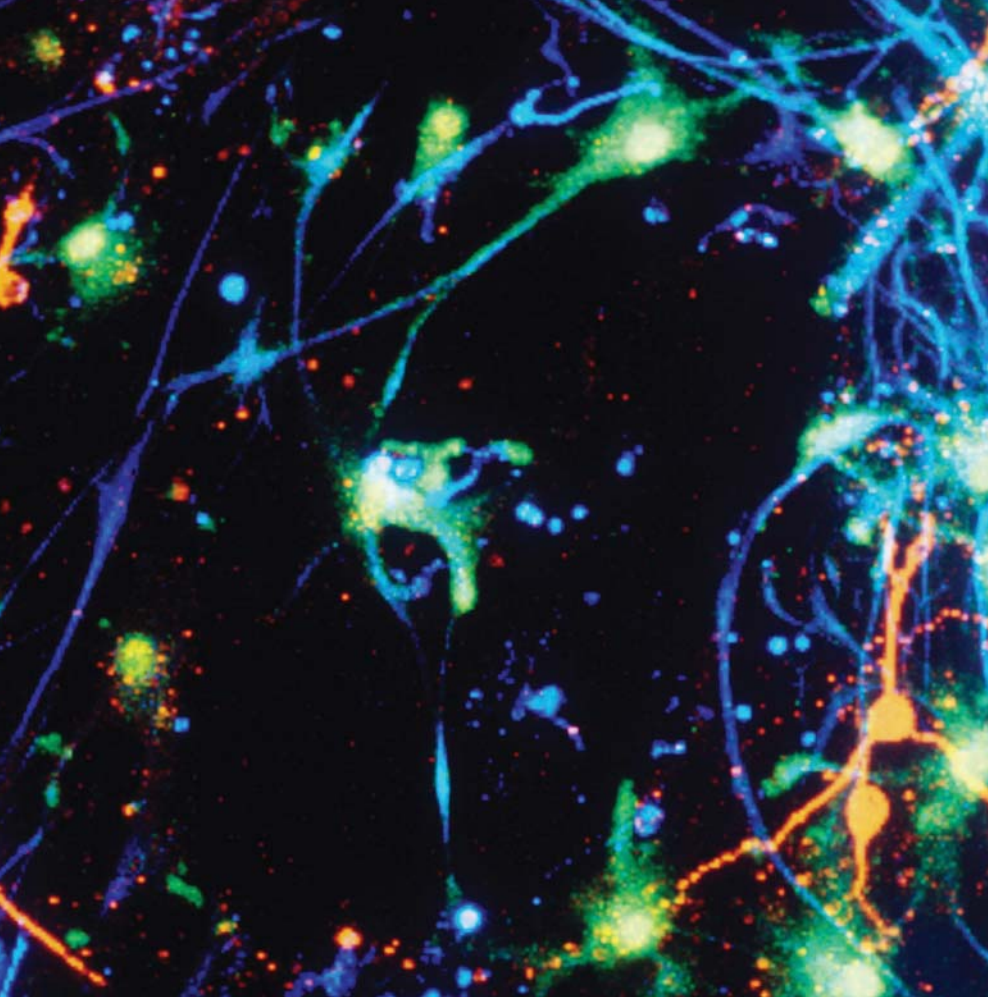
term given to the school of thought that refuses to accept traditional human limitations such as death, disease and other biological frailties.”

Other older examples have also given science the power to influence what it means to be human. In the second half of the 19th century, Jules

Verne’s scientific romances² captured a wildly progressive view of science, with such wonderful creations as deep-sea submarines and ships to the moon. Science dazzled the human imagination and grounded a universal belief in human progress, both moral and material. But a darker side of that

1. *Frankenstein: the modern Prometheus*, published in 1818, is British author Mary Shelley’s (1797-1851) most famous work.

2. Jules Verne [1828-1905], a French writer, is best known for his *Voyage to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873).



Microscope photos of stem cells taken in 2001 by the Généthon laboratory in Evry (Génopole) in France.

© Philippe Plailly / Eurelios / LookatSciences

'negative' traits. In the U.S. and Britain, eugenics was often class- and privilege based, with the middle and upper classes considered to be biologically superior. For a while eugenics was mainstream, subscribed to by scientific humanists like the great science-fiction author H. G. Wells,³ who was concerned about species immortality.

Portraits of the 'perfect' scientist

Other scientific humanists, such as George Sarton,⁴ one of the founders of the discipline of the history of science took a more benign (though still elitist) approach. In 1924, in an article on 'The New Humanism'⁵ published in *Isis*, he wrote that science is the "fruit of an international and ageless collaboration, one single organized body, the common treasure of all peoples, of all races; in fact, the only patrimony upon which they all have equal rights." For Sarton, humanity's true purpose is in the "creation of new values, intellectual values; the gradual unveiling and unfolding of the harmony of nature, the development and organization of what we call art and science." Yet again, science was given power over values and meaning.

Using science to better the world is a project as old as science itself.

Another universalist, Morris Goran, writing in *The Journal of Higher Education* in 1943 described his perfect scientist in a politically utopian vision: "He will belong to mankind at all times, serving human values, eternally vigilant for transgressions, and policing society against tyranny, intolerance, and despotism . . . The threat of one moment's refusal by the scientists of the world to do the bidding of tyrants would forever ensure peaceful solutions of world problems." This is the scientist as philosopher king, whose knowledge of science gives him power and moral authority.

3. Herbert George Wells [1866-1946], English writer of science fiction, is best known to readers for *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

4. George Sarton [1884-1956], the Belgian born American historian, is known primarily for his 3-volume *Introduction to the History of Science*.

5. This article was originally published in 1918, in *Scientia*, in French.

6 George Perkins Marsh [1801-1882], was an American diplomat and philologist.

In the 1970s, science and humanism finally clashed when they intersected in sociobiology. In this new discipline, evolutionary theory was applied to social behavior in animals and humans. Extreme forms of biological determinism argued that the social status quo reflected biology. Society, in effect, was being forced to mirror the science of the day. Applying biological determinism to male aggression, female subjugation, or lagging IQ scores among African Americans suggested an unchangeable reality of inequality and inferiority.

Science cannot tell us who we should be and it cannot tell us what "better" means.

Paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould fought the determinists through such popular books as *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981). For Gould, humanity shared a common genetic heritage, on top of which existed significant social and cultural differences. G. P. Marsh,⁶ the man who first sounded a warning about humanity's environmental impact on the natural world, beginning in the 19th century, believed that science and technology would solve the problems created by humans, but in that solving would create new problems.

We will need both science and humanism to work together in the future. We should also learn from past mistakes. We must not expect from science that it will provide us with ultimate meanings. It cannot tell us who we should be and it cannot tell us what "better" means. Science is a human creation, and it has the meaning and purpose that each generation gives it. Responsibility and ethical behavior should be central to the choices we make. ■

Michal Meyer was born in Israel. She has worked as a meteorologist in New Zealand and Fiji and as a journalist in Israel. She has a Ph.D. in the history of science and has worked for the Chemical Heritage Foundation since September 2009. She is the editor in chief of Chemical Heritage magazine (www.chemheritage.org/discover/magazine/index.aspx)

Bioethics: unimagined challenges

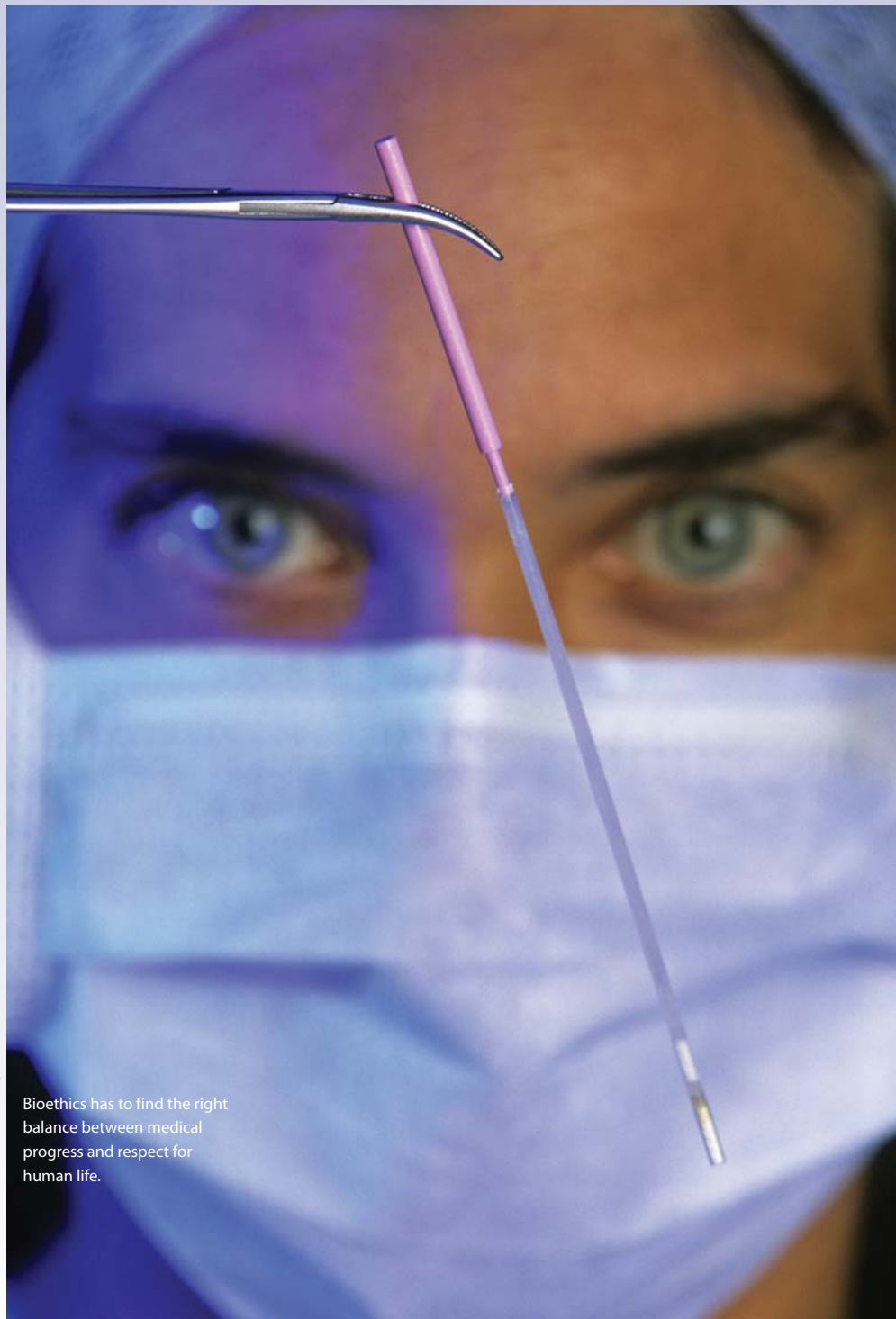
Faced with the major dilemmas raised by progress in bioscience and biotechnology, bioethics needs to provide new ethical solutions, aimed at reconciling greater acceptance of the potential of these disciplines with a vigilance and responsibility that is crucial for protecting the values of humanism in all circumstances.

SALVADOR BERGEL

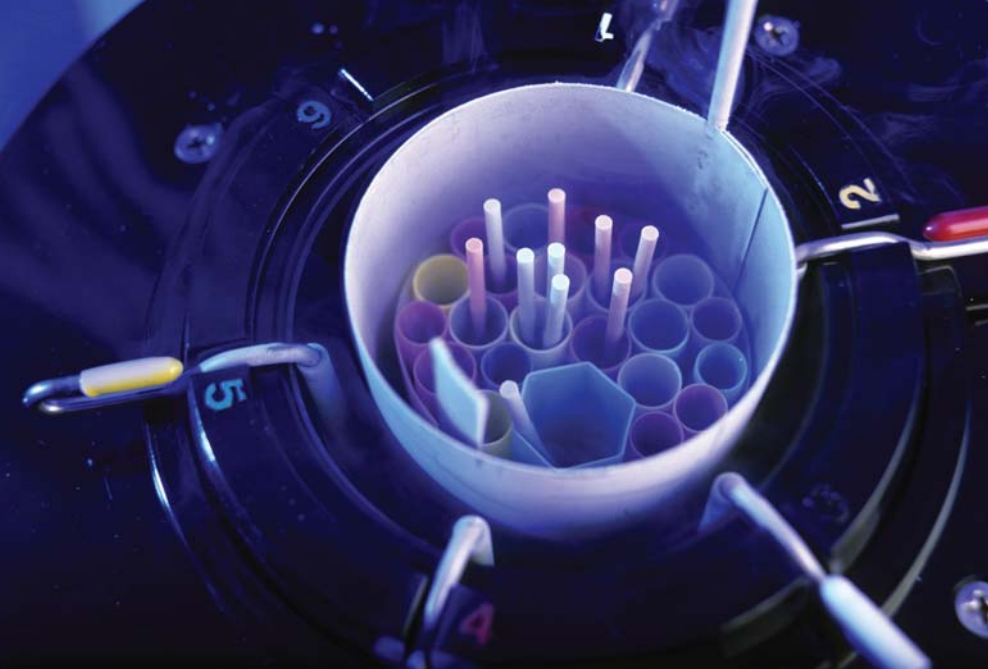
Bioethics did not arise through some accident or sudden illumination on the part of a clairvoyant thinker. Its emergence can be explained by historical, scientific and social factors. Over the past fifty years, spectacular progress in medical science has opened up unforeseen possibilities for scientific research, and has brought irrefutable improvement in public health, while raising unanticipated challenges in terms of ethics and morals. Each new breakthrough in biology and the health sciences, such as organ grafts, which have saved countless lives, or assisted reproduction techniques, which can solve fertility issues for couples, has faced social and psychological obstacles, and raised religious and ethical questions. The same is true of research on human embryos—a particularly sensitive subject as it touches on the origins of life, and involves moral concepts as well as scientific and even financial interests—from pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (a technique that permits babies to be born who are free of incurable inherited diseases), to the use of stem cells (which can transform into a wide range of specialized cells and are crucial for the future of regenerative medicine).

1. American scientist Van R. Potter was the first to use the term “bioethics”, in an article published in 1970.

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Bioethics has to find the right balance between medical progress and respect for human life.



© Massimo Brega/LookatSciences

Flasks of liquid nitrogen containing paillettes used in assisted reproductive technology.

These are not isolated or limited discoveries. We are witnessing a genuine biological revolution. In just a few decades, scientists have managed to decode the chemical basis of heredity, the genetic code shared by all living beings, and to lay the foundations for molecular biology and a new genetics. This has led to genetic engineering, in other words, a 'technoscience' that can manipulate and exchange genes between members of a single species and between different species. Mankind can now manipulate and modify genetic information for practical purposes, and can even act on his own biological nature as a species—which is certainly the most disturbing aspect from a bioethical point of view.

This progress in the life sciences has repercussions for the very concept of what it means to be human, and raises ethical, social and legal issues that go beyond science. This is where bioethics is called upon, to arrive at a fair and insightful balance between medical progress and respect for human life.

Bioethics must recognize the benefits of these scientific breakthroughs, while remaining constantly alert to the risks and dangers they may present. While this progress can lead to promising new ways of eradicating diseases that have long affected human health, it also raises justifiable fears about undesirable effects and possible misuse, such as genetic

manipulation and its various applications, the return of eugenic doctrines—which now have a range of sophisticated tools at their disposal—or experiments on vulnerable populations.

The appearance of bioethics coincided with the widespread outcry raised by the horrors of the Second World War, a reaction that culminated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The overriding goal of bioethics is based on this humanist principle, of affirming the primacy of the human being and defending the dignity and freedom inherent in the mere fact of belonging to the species, in the face of the shifting and constantly evolving context of the life sciences.

Dialogue, consensus and tolerance

Bioethics stands as a bulwark of humanism both in terms of its goals as well as its multidisciplinary nature. To provide appropriate solutions to new scientific challenges, for which traditional ethics has proven to be insufficient, we have had to find ways for the natural sciences and social sciences to communicate with one another, each with its own methodologies and specific viewpoints, and to bring together different fields of knowledge, ranging from philosophy, medicine and biology, to law, sociology and anthropology.

Bioethics also integrates the values of humanism in its methods and practices, aiming to achieve consensus through a constructive and intelligent dialogue with all the various sectors concerned. Society is no longer content to look on passively when faced with choices that threaten its survival and compromise its moral responsibility. Bioethics therefore

has to impose an attitude of openness and tolerance, geared toward the adoption of standards and laws that respect the realities of multicultural communities, with their own unique traditions and beliefs.

But these humanist values do more than just encourage theoretical thought; they also apply to specific issues in everyday life, such as problems raised by hospital practices. The field has also expanded to include the social dimensions of health, such as poverty, food and access to safe drinking water, to health services and drugs.

Bioethics has sparked a global militancy that is helping to turn the ideals of world justice into reality, through the initiatives of national ethics committees and hospital committees, as well as through teaching and research. It should also be noted that, almost without exception, medical schools now include bioethics in their teaching programmes, demonstrating its essential role in medical practice.

Hospital bioethics committees have been set up in virtually every health service, and there is not a single country without a national bioethics committee or an equivalent group of ad hoc experts. Codes, standards and protocols addressing bioethics have been adopted everywhere, and UNESCO considered it essential to create a forum for reflection and debate—the International Bioethics Committee—and to strengthen the discipline by drawing up guidelines based on human rights, as set out in three Universal Declarations.

This alliance between bioethics and human rights heralds a new form of humanism that is in tune with the expectations and challenges of our times. This renewed humanism recognizes the biological and ethical components of human nature, whose dignity must be safeguarded here and now, while assuming the responsibility and the duty to protect life in all its manifestations, for generations to come and ultimately, to guarantee the survival of the species. ■

Salvador Bergel (Argentina) holds a law degree, is a specialist in bioethics, and occupies the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics at the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

2. An example, among others is the aberrant pseudo-scientific experiments to which prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps were subjected.



Seven pointers for the future of mankind

If, nowadays, value has been transformed into price, and a tree is only worth the timber it produces, or an animal its meat and leather, it is, according to Cristovam Buarque, because the humanist project has lost its way over the centuries. For a new form of humanism to emerge that is founded on ethical modernity, it must take account of the planetary challenges we are facing.

CRISTOVAM BUARQUE

Humanism, as it appeared in the Renaissance, resulted from a merging of revived classical Greek thinking, with its sense of the primacy of man over the Earth, consolidating man as a being apart from the rest of nature – separated and dominant. This vision not only prevailed, it was reinforced by the absolute domination and transformation of nature by man.

While this humanism has gained ground, it nevertheless began a course of dehumanization. The atomic bomb alone is a symbol of the creation of a schizophrenic civilization. The human being dominated nature, using the technology that he created, but humanity started to be dominated by technology that now defines the characteristics of the social system, destroying the environment and increasing social inequality.

The uncertain future of our planet means that we will have to rethink the

humanist project, which, for me must be built on seven pillars.

Promoting planetary politics

What the city meant to the Athenians has, today, become the nation state for modern democracies. And citizenship – this Greek creation that indicated the commitment of city residents to the city

This article is an extract of a presentation given by Cristovam Buarque at the Third Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in May 2010.

itself - began to turn into a commitment to the whole country.

The present planetary crisis raises the issue of our responsibility as citizens of the Earth. In other words, it calls for an individual commitment to the fate of humankind and of the Earth. For me, this new humanism must be sensitive to the importance of all human beings, to the feeling of global solidarity.

Respecting cultural diversity

In the past, man has been contemptuous of his fellow men, as witnessed by the genocide against indigenous peoples of America, the enslavement of Africa and all the other forms of racism and xenophobia that reveal a sense of superiority. A new humanism must get rid of ethnocentrism; it must become 'acentric' and respect cultural diversity. We must calm the conflicts between cultures and consider their variety as an indicator of the wealth of civilization, where their interaction is more than the sum of the parts.

Caring for the environment

Humanism has been irresponsibly arrogant with regard to nature, seeing no value in it. It has exhausted natural resources and undermined the ecological balance to such an extent that the continuity of civilization is threatened. Only human labour or a price set by the market generate value on a threatened and worthless planet. The value of trees is in its timber, that of animals in its meat and leather. The new humanism that I am calling for should seek a civilization that is fully integrated into the environmental balance. Economic output should no longer be measured only by the sum of material goods and services - GDP. It must also take into account any costs due to waste resulting from the production process.

Guaranteeing equal opportunities

Humanism was an oasis for the dream of equality, but capitalism widened inequalities to such an extent that differences in life expectancy now depend on personal income. I dream of a humanism that ensures equal opportunities, that will act as a ladder for social ascent, drawing ecological lines to define the limits on a consumption that is depleting the environment, while protecting the dispossessed.

Promoting balanced production

The idea of valuing labour, instead of land, made man the value-maker and put workers at the centre of the production process. However, this great leap worked against humanism when the value was transformed into a price defined by mystical market forces beyond human control. Explanations replace justice, demands replace will, and consumer desires replace the fulfilment of needs. To build a new humanism we must redefine the march of nations and of humankind towards an ecologically balanced production process. And it must assign value to non-tradable goods.

The new humanism must also abolish the slavery that continues to imprison man by reducing him to a mere cog in the production process.

Nowadays, under the new knowledge and human capital economy, the key to economic progress and social justice must be sought in quality education for all. The challenge of the new humanism is to ensure that each child has access to equally good education, regardless of race, family income or place of residence.

Integration through education

Humanism in the industrial era promised a world of equal income, thanks to the economy. Capitalism said that the increase in production and the laws of the market would lead to a 'trickle down', distributing the income from top to bottom of the social pyramid; whereas in socialism, the distribution would be ensured by the state and the laws of planning.

Nowadays, under the new knowledge and human capital economy, the key to economic progress and social justice must be sought in quality education for all. The challenge of the new humanism is to ensure that each child has access to equally good education, regardless of race, family income or place of residence. The 'trickle down' promised by capitalism will no

longer come from the market, but instead from a 'trickle up' induced by education.

The long-term purpose of this process will be the integration of all peoples around the world, using all available techniques in a planetary network.

An ethical technical modernity

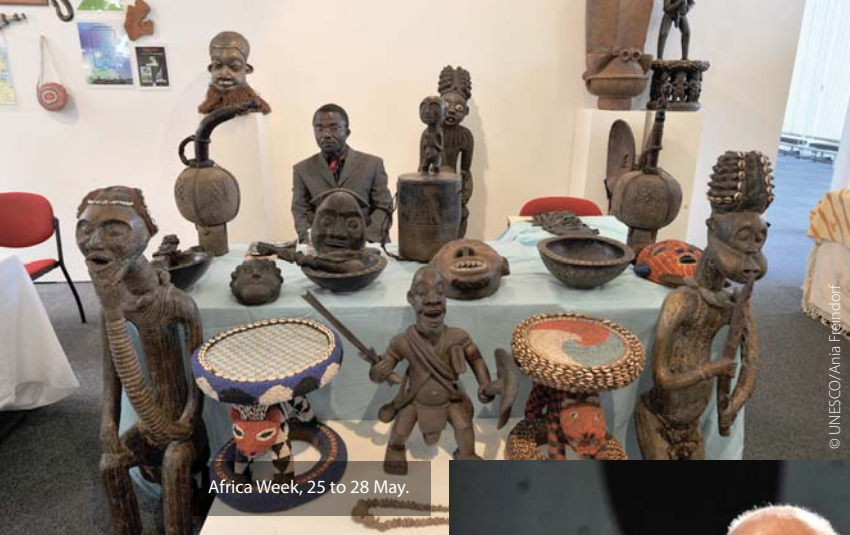
The industrial process of civilization is characterized by the pursuit of technical modernity, defined by the use of up-to-date technology. This required the creation of an economic rationality that justifies the products of cutting-edge technology and leaves behind the social goals, thus relegating ethical values.

The new humanism must use ethical values as vectors that set up the social goals, and will see them as the foundation of an economic rationality that defines all technical choices. Even here, techniques should be chosen according to ethical and aesthetic standards, not only in terms of economic efficiency.

Technical modernity, defined by the originality of technology and humanism, will be replaced, in the new humanism, by an ethical modernity. For instance, instead of being defined by the number of private cars in circulation, modern transportation would be judged by its results - reduction in travel time, user comfort, punctuality, universal access.

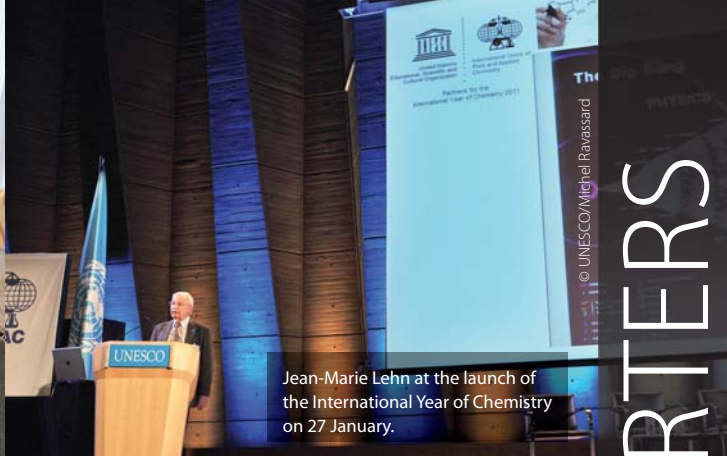
Like Einstein trying to dialogue with God - in whom he did not believe - to learn how he had drawn all the details of the world, the new humanism must imagine the ideal way to build a civilization that is democratic, tolerant, efficient for humanity and each human being, and that respects nature. The only way is dialogue between people and between men and nature. The new humanism will promote the dialogue between cultures and Mother Earth. ■

Cristovam Buarque is a Senator and Professor at the University of Brasilia, and was Minister of Education in 2003. He has devoted his political career particularly to combating illiteracy, implementing agrarian reforms, improving the Brazilian health system and improving working conditions in the country.



Africa Week, 25 to 28 May.

© UNESCO/Ania Freindorf



Jean-Marie Lehn at the launch of the International Year of Chemistry on 27 January.

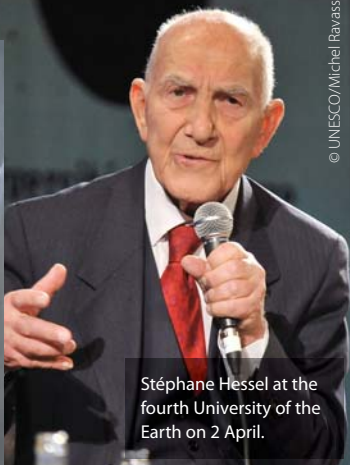
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فلمی از کلود لارمن
LANCÈMENT DE
SHOAH
de Claude Lanzmann
en persan

Claude Lanzmann launches his film *Shoah* in Persian on 7 March, 2011



© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard

Stéphane Hessel at the fourth University of the Earth on 2 April.



8 March, International Women's Day: Irina Bokova with a delegation from Thailand.

© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard



Alasita festival, a Bolivian ritual, 24 January.

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Modeste Nzapassara (Central African Republic), 27 March.

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Amos Coulanges, a year after the earthquake in Haiti on 21 January.

© UNESCO/Danica Bijeljic



Mónica González Mujica (Chile), on 26 January.

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Homage to Franz Liszt by the Zoltan Kodaly orchestra (Hungary) on 29 July.

© UNESCO/Ania Freindorf



An afternoon with some astronaut on 22 March.

© UNESCO/Danica Bijeljic



Mimi Barthelemy (Haiti) dedicates her latest children's books on 21 February.

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International UNESCO-L'Oréal laureates, 2 March 2011

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2011. UNESCO HEADQUARTERS



Child soldiers:

a new life ahead

Recently appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, the American actor and director, Forest Whitaker, is doing his utmost to help child soldiers. He uses every available opportunity to help them find a voice, to rejoin the communities they have been banished from, to get an education, to forgive themselves and regain their self esteem.

FOREST WHITAKER interviewed by Katerina Markelova

In the 2008 film *Kassim, The Dream*, where you were Executive Producer, the hero is a former child soldier who cannot forgive himself for the crimes he committed. Who is he?

The tragic story of the young Ugandan, Kassim Ousama, is a good example. He is a beautiful man, a great boxer who was famous as a light middleweight in the early 2000's. But the demons from his past caught up with him, preventing him from realizing his dream. He quit in the middle of training for the world championship. In the film you see him go back to Uganda and visit the grave of his father, who was killed because of

him. Kassim has lost his self-esteem and watches himself deteriorating from within, as he tries to reconcile – not just with the world, but with himself, with the things he did as a child soldier.

Have many of the former child soldiers that you met managed to forgive themselves?

No. But I met a lot who still have nightmares. Some of those who had committed atrocities had come to some form of self-forgiveness, but it was not complete. The most difficult part for them is rejoining their own communities, where they may have

carried out acts of violence against their own neighbours. It's one thing to know that these children were taken away and forced to kill, but a killer remains a killer in the eyes of society. How, under these conditions, does one forgive oneself? How to heal oneself of such suffering? It needs the most extraordinary efforts. These young people need to find

activities that occupy them completely. Otherwise it's hard for them to move on.

I'm convinced that education provides a way out for them. Education is an opening of the mind, so that people can see the possibilities that are available to each of us. Education can bring understanding, and then, hopefully, we can move to a form of compassion. And this, hopefully, can lead us to forgiveness, which in turn leads to love – a love of ourselves and a love of others. This is something that child soldiers continue to work through with the tools that they've been given. And some are more successful than others.

Why did you decide to support the cause of child soldiers?

I began working with child soldiers four or five years ago. Before that, I'd been campaigning against malaria in Africa and working with organizations dealing with physical abuse. I've also worked with gangs in the USA. I see parallels between the child soldiers in Africa and some of the people I have known in gangs.

I don't divorce myself from the rest of the world. I see these young people as parts of myself. I strongly believe that we are part of a single entity and that ultimately we want to connect as one. Trying to understand and help these young gang members and child soldiers is, for me, not an intellectual, or even an emotional choice. It's a spiritual choice. It doesn't need to be explained or justified, it's in the natural order of events. It's the way I see the universe and the way I perceive God.

Child soldier with his family, Angola, 2004.

What do the gangs in the USA and the civil wars in Africa have in common?

That is precisely the question I look at in the documentary "Common Destiny" that we are working on right now. We interviewed a Ugandan child soldier and a member of the Blood gang in Los Angeles. We started to compare their stories and realized that they were extremely similar. They were both forced into violence. And they're both fighting people from their own neighbourhood, even their own family.

As a child, I grew up watching the birth of the gangs in the United States, particularly the Crips and the Bloods in Los Angeles. I watched them as they first named themselves and then became international gangs. I lived in the Blue or Crip neighbourhood, and my cousin lived in the Red or Blood neighbourhood. My cousin joined the Bloods, and if I had joined the Crips, we would have been enemies and might have killed each other. In the conflict zones of Africa, where armed rebels kidnap children and turn them into



soldiers, don't young cousins become enemies in just the same way?

So there are similarities between the gangs and child soldiers. They both slowly get caught up in the world of smuggling, trafficking drugs and arms, even if they're not always visible.

In 'Common Destiny' you are going to show the mechanisms that can bring peace to communities torn apart by conflict. How do you intend to do this?

We're going to follow a number of individuals around the world living in conflict zones. With the support of UNESCO, we will be following their journeys, their struggles, their successes. And at the same time there will be interviews about what people feel peace is. We will be talking to people from government and to NGOs. The documentary will allow people's voices to be heard, while giving examples of how we come to peace.

We haven't yet decided which countries we will be going to. I'm in the process of doing that right now and was in discussions earlier, here at UNESCO. I can just say that I think we will be looking at different types of conflict, such as those linked to the environment, migration, and xenophobia. I think I will be working on this project for about two years.

Do you have any other projects as a new UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador?

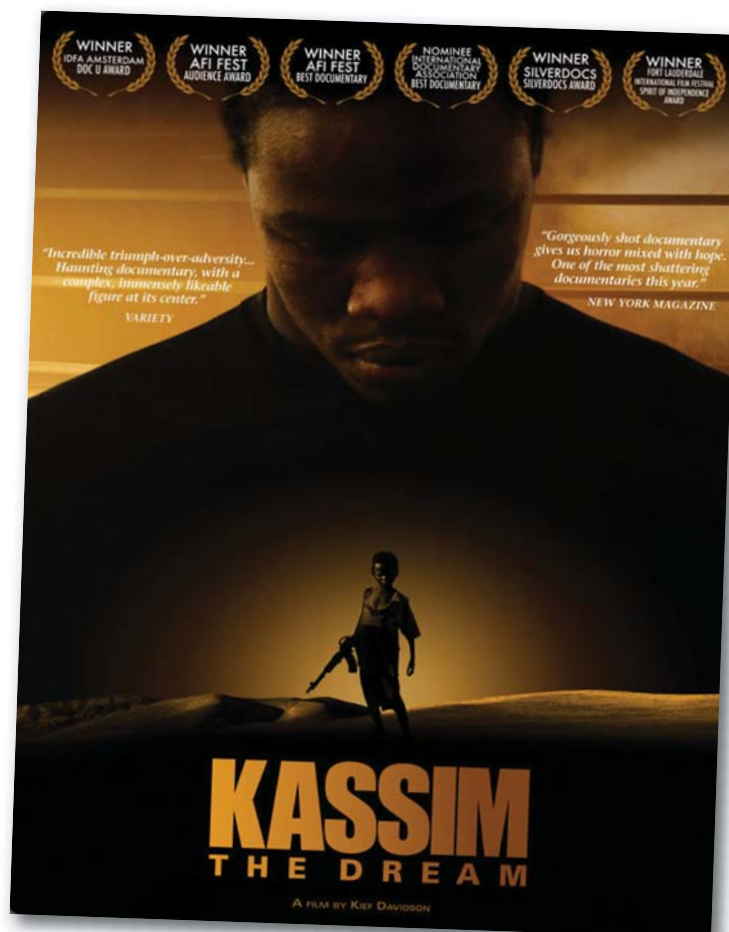
I have a few. I'm going to be working on a training process with youth on conflict resolution. We'll help child refugees to move back to their countries of origin, and will train others to support them on their return. We will also set up an Internet space, so that they can be connected to the rest of the world and each other.

My own production company is presently making about six documentaries, most of them on peace and reconciliation. We are also making a feature film called 'Better Angels' with a French company, Studio 37, on the same subject. This film is about a war reporter who goes to Uganda to interview Kony, chief of the Lord's Resistance Army, which includes child soldiers.

You are going to play that journalist, aren't you?

Yes, we went to Uganda a few months ago to do some more research, to interview some more soldiers and to

© A Believe Media and Urban Landscapes film production



Poster for the film, 'Kassim, the Dream', for which Forest Whitaker was executive producer in 2008.

make sure that we were completely accurate in what we were portraying. Meanwhile we are doing a piece just on compassion, and what compassion really means. We've just started working on a documentary about the Rwandan

cyclists who were caught up in the civil war in the early 1990s. It's an uplifting film. And we shouldn't forget that the 2012 Olympics in London will be the first time a Rwandan cyclist has competed. ■

250,000 child soldiers worldwide

According to a UN report published in 2010, almost a quarter of a million children worldwide have been recruited by rebel groups and armies. The previous year, though, there had been some success in demobilizing child soldiers, particularly in the Philippines, Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan, Sri Lanka and Burundi, where they were reformed and reintegrated into society. The UN pointed out that there are no statistics on the number of children killed in conflicts around the world.

Children are easy prey for militias and other rebel organizations and can be very useful to them. It is not hard to indoctrinate children or get them to take greater risks than an adult, even to commit worse atrocities. Children are likely to feel they have to do what an adult tells them to do. And they will more readily take any drugs they are given. In the July-September 2011 issue of the UNESCO Courier, the former Congolese soldier, Serge Amisi, who went on to become an artist, gives a compelling account of his experiences.

2010 marked the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, concerning the involvement of children in armed conflicts. To date, 132 Member States have ratified the Optional Protocol, while 24 have signed it and 36 have neither signed nor ratified it. – J.Š.

See: 'Serge Amisi and his Miracle Weapons' available on line: www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-courier/archives/ (use keywords to search within the digital archive).

A special place for the imagination



Book of Psalms, by painter and sculptor, Patrick Medrano and photographer, Katy Anderson. These two American artists work together in Houston, Texas (USA)

© Patrick Medrano & Katy Anderson
www.katyanderson.com <http://www.katyanderson.com> www.patrickmedrano.com <http://www.patrickmedrano.com>

THE FUTURE OF THE BOOK

Since the turn of the 21st century we have been seeing a flurry of virtual libraries opening on the Internet and eBooks getting off to a flying start. Are these new media likely to dethrone King Paper, until now the unchallenged ruler of his kingdom? The Chilean writer Antonio Skármeta, whose childhood experiences of radio started him on his career, wagers that the 'traditional' book will survive the digital frenzy.

ANTONIO SKÁRMETA

I am an incurable romantic who admires the paper book, along with ancient parchments and the cave art of long-disappeared cultures. But that has not stopped me from being one of that species of writer that has not hated television. For over ten years, and with

more imagination than money, I made television programmes that went out very late at night and were often in the top ten most popular programmes, rebroadcast all across Latin America.

This is not just a result of the vein of magical realism that runs through Latin American literature, with its spiritual leader, Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez,¹ but also of a deep conviction

since childhood that tales that are written down shine more brilliantly when they capture the primary joy of

1. Colombian writer, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

This article is taken from a paper presented by Antonio Skármeta at the Second UNESCO World Forum on Culture and Cultural Industries, *Focus 2011*, in Monza, Italy, 6 to 8 June 2011.



📍 "Box of books", painting by Dominique Mantel

spoken language. This conviction did not come to me through reading Foucault² or anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss,³ but from living in a rural village at the age of eight with my grandmother, and, at eleven or twelve, with my friends in a neighbourhood of Buenos Aires.

My childhood was a long love affair with radio, and my first experience of stories told without using any kind of equipment. After dinner, when my grandmother sat down to knit her endless cardigans, she would ask me to sit next to her, while she listened to episodes of horrible melodramas with plaintive music. She was so engrossed in these radio serials that she would get cross if anyone asked her a question or if the telephone rang. And she would rant at the stupidity of the protagonists who were more reluctant than her to act.

I remember one serial where, episode after episode, two crooks tried in vain to steal a million-dollar diamond ring from an aristocrat. Every time they were about to succeed, something happened – the maid came into the bedroom, her husband came over to kiss her, the lady shut herself in the bathroom to take a shower. One day they poured a sleeping draught into her soup, and, when their victim fell to the floor, they went about removing her ring. But it was so tight that, after ten minutes of struggling, they had to escape without the jewel. “The fools!” she said to me, beside herself, in her Croatian-tinted Spanish. My grandmother was a passionate woman. “All they had to do was chop off her finger with an axe!”

Getting started as a writer

The electricity supply in the village was precarious. The frequent power cuts meant that it was impossible to keep the radio on. My grandmother used to curse if the power cut out at the height of the action. So she would turn to me and say, “So, Antonio, what do you think is happening right now?” And with a lot of gesticulating and “um’s and ah’s,” I would tell her the story, with completely fantastic details, just as she liked it, straight out of my imagination. My grandmother would nod and continue her knitting, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, as if that were where my story was coming from.

One Saturday, when the electricity was working and her thriller was blaring out of the radio at full volume, my grandmother turned off the set and said to me “Antonio, I prefer it when you tell the story.” This, I think, was what got me started in my career as a writer – with no help whatsoever!

As you will understand, satisfying the appetite for fiction of a grandmother was a fabulous invitation to embrace the fragile condition of writer. The glowing report handed out by my forebear for my dramatic ‘supplements’ turned out to be more encouragement for me than a PhD in Creative writing from Harvard.

For a Chilean teenager at the time, to be a writer obviously meant being a North American writer. And in New York! Climbing to the top of the Empire State Building with a pretty blonde in the palm of his hand like King Kong. There, in that great global city, was all the excitement anyone needed. I’d have to go ‘on the road’ like Kerouac⁴ and the Beat poets.

Being a writer who learned to love literature without any material – except perhaps the human voice and the silence of the desert – it didn’t much matter in which airport stories landed. For me, the problem that literature poses lies not so much in what media is used, but in the lack of readers. If I sing the praises of the paper book, it is because, until now it has been the vehicle that enabled me to find readers in over thirty languages. But that is also the case for the films based on my novels, and even the operas made from them.

So I am not afraid of transformations. On the contrary, I welcome them. I use them. I know that the letters my postman will deliver to Pablo Neruda will provoke the same emotion, whatever medium or surface they are presented on, be it a book, iPad, eBook, film or even a theatre play.

Literature is much more than information

When I looked at the statistics on the number of people reading electronic books I noticed that, up to now, the market for them in my own language, Castilian, is disproportionately far less than that in English.

But I would like to put forward the following idea – that the medium of paper when used in literature, in other words the book, is so sophisticated an object, at least in the field of art, that it will always hold its place alongside the new media. And I even wonder if it will not do so to its own advantage, for one very good reason – the screen has become the basic working tool for mankind.

Wherever we are, most of the working day is spent between the more or less strident flashes – according to the quality of the machine – of computers. The electronic world is above all associated with work. It intensifies our vision, and absorbs our attention. It controls us.

Of course the computer also offers a special place for communication between individuals who feel connected when they are using it. But it is interesting that the most popular form of expression between surfers on the internet is the abbreviated, concise, minimalist message. That of information. Twitter.

I know that the letters my postman will deliver to Pablo Neruda will provoke the same emotion, whatever medium or surface they are presented on, be it a book, iPad, eBook, film or even a theatre play.

But that is exactly the point. Literature is so much more than information. A scientific document is a mine of information, and that is all that textbooks are – information that has to be understood, learned, mastered and applied.

Literature is far removed from these pragmatic criteria. It is the pleasure of words, conjuring images that transport the soul to places that the language of science has not yet codified. To be brief but clear, creative literature, whether narrative or poetry, belongs more to the domain of pleasure than of work.

I think that this psychological factor – avoidance of the other – will protect the book from the voracity of information. From those who provide it and those who ask for it. Obviously we can buy a DVD and watch the latest film to win an award at Cannes on a screen at home. But we continue to go to the cinema. We are apparently religious enough that our intimate conversations with God take place through prayer. But we go to temples and churches and take part in the rituals. We can obviously speak words of love to a loved one by telephone or by email – but we seek them out so that our kiss can transport us beyond their lips. We can spend

whole days burning our retinas on the movements of the stock market, and then, in the evening, watch a superb film where the beaches of Tahiti are portrayed in three dimensions, with the beauties painted by Gauguin. But what we really want is to be on these beaches, admiring the skin, enjoying the breeze, swimming in the warm cobalt waters of the sea, and not left with a substitute.

A sensible cohabitation between media

In any discussion of the future of the book, we need to remember that the story carried by the paper – from ancient parchments to modern print – has created prestigious spaces for communication, such as bookshops, national and local libraries and book clubs, and that these forms of publication have joined with other arts, transforming the printed and bound story into an object like no other – with

its graphic design, its illustrations, its covers, and the people who flock around them in public spaces.

The publication of a good book rapidly evokes collective admiration – it is a cultural event. I doubt whether the ghost-like publication of a story in the private solitude of digital space ever possessed the same enthusiastic grace as the birth of a book printed on paper.

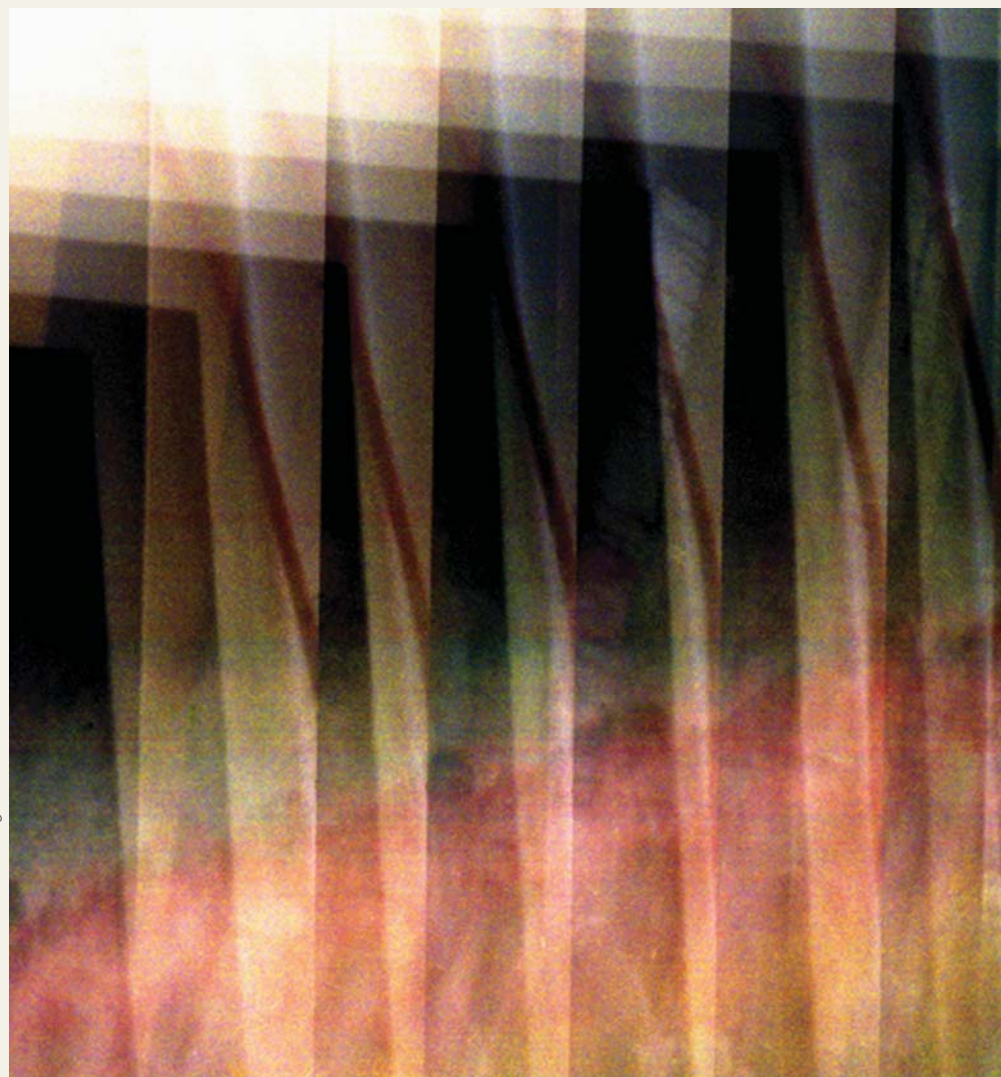
2. Michel Foucault, [1926-1984], French philosopher and Professor at the Collège de France.

3. Claude Lévi-Strauss [1908-2009], French anthropologist and member of the Académie française.

4. Jack Kerouac [1922-1969], American writer, is best known for his novel *On the Road*. He belonged to the Beat Generation (beatniks), young writers and poets revolting against a society that they considered to be materialistic and superficial.

5. Pablo Neruda [1904-1973], Chilean poet, Nobel laureate in Literature, 1971. In his novel, *Burning Patience*, Skármeta tells the story of Mario Jimenez, the postman on Isla Negra in Chile, where his only client is Pablo Neruda, who went there to write in peace and quiet.

© "Blinking Transcendent" by American artist, Ruth Lantz



© Ruth Lantz - www.local-artists.org/users/ruth-lantz



© Saulius Valius/UNESCO

📍 *The Open Book*, temporary installation by Lithuanian sculptor Saulius Valius, exhibited at UNESCO in January 2004

When we sit at home in front of the TV, we have a whole range of programmes to choose from, in several languages. By zapping we can go all over the world. But our initial inclination is always towards local news, towards the intimacy and sense of belonging inspired by faces close at hand and the events of our own country, which provide the subject matter for our everyday conversations and discussions.

I do not see how the electronic book could acquire this aura of admiring simultaneity and collective attention offered by the solid structure of the publications industry and its networks of distribution, from bookshops to newspapers. What I am trying to say is that the publication of a book using existing methods is a cultural event that puts the extravagant imagination born of the writer's fantasy onto the collective agenda of the people.

I wager that there will be a wide cohabitation of many media – the digital media will remain the faithful allies of research, information, the 'work' of the

Print on paper will remain a special place for the non-utilitarian imagination, the combination of the arts that find expression in the book as object.

intellect, the 'solitary' contact with a story. And print on paper will remain a special place for the non-utilitarian imagination, the combination of the arts that find expression in the book as object.

Meanwhile, the noble task that those institutions concerned with universal culture have set out upon – the creation of virtual libraries – deserves the highest forms of praise. By making all the magnificent knowledge of mankind available to people, since stories were first written down, is an event that we welcome with joy, as it means that this information will be distributed and will influence the existence of millions of people, who will, as a result, become better informed, more sensitive and, consequently, more free.

If the printed book is to survive alongside the almost instantaneous publication offered by the Internet and the eBook, large bookstores and places where books are sold have to become more appealing. When someone likes a book, they often think it would make a good present. And a printed book is the perfect choice. We are already familiar with these large, communal spaces – cinema has not killed off theatre, television has not meant the end of cinema, any more than the excellent quality of reproductions has sunk museums and their originals... And there is another aspect, which I have detected as I move through various different languages and continents – people have a longing for intimacy, to be close to the artist and the work of art, a wish to flee all the ear-splitting braying, to be in real life, at the heart of events. There is a desire to by-pass the intermediaries. This might be a minor trend now, but it is on the increase.

Those who say that the book offers a more intimate and less mediated form of communication with the reader are right – there is no need to click on a mouse to plunge in. May our dearest dream be this intimacy with art, with the artist and with the reflected silence that comes from entering the world of creation and coming away with the inspiration to approach life with greater joy and a bit more spice!

Today the printed book is still the most intimate medium, the least ephemeral, the most concrete, the most sensual, the most visionary and even the one that gives off the most marvellous aroma – that of blessed ink spread onto the page. ■

Antonio Skármeta, is a Chilean writer of Croatian descent. Between 1973 and 1989, he lived in exile, first in Argentina then Germany, a country to which he returned in 2000 as ambassador to Chile. His novels include *The Dancer and the Thief* (Norton, 2008), *Burning Patience* (Pantheon, 1987), and *I Dreamt the Snow was Burning* (Readers International, 1985). His illustrated children's book, *The Composition* (Groundwood Books, 2000), won him the 2003 UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance.



The Flight of Prudence

© Jennifer Koskinen

Prudence Mabhena at the Mountain Film Festival, in July 2010.

Prudence Mabhena does not have legs, but music has given her wings. Through singing, this 22-year-old Zimbabwean has overcome several obstacles that hindered her journey: a congenital disease, amputation of both legs, family rejection, discrimination, poverty. Together with seven other young people who shared a similar fate, she founded the group Liyana ('It's raining' in Ndebele), which inspired American film director, Roger Ross Williams to produce the 2010 Oscar-winning short film, "Music by Prudence." He tells us about his encounter with Prudence that changed his life.

ROGER ROSS WILLIAMS interviewed by Cathy Nolan

How did you meet Prudence?

It was a friend from New York who told me about her. I started writing to the King George VI School for children with disabilities that Prudence attends in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The Headmistress sent me some footage of the band performing along with a three-page text of Prudence recounting her life story. It was so heart wrenching. What

drama! Yet, such hope at the same time! I then decided to make my first independent documentary.

By Christmas Day 2008, a few months later, I was already in Zimbabwe. There, I followed and filmed Prudence for two weeks. When I returned to the United States and watched the footage, I thought to myself, "I have discovered a true star."

Was Prudence cooperative with you?

Prudence took a little bit of convincing. She didn't really believe that I would show up, since she was used to a life of betrayal and disappointment. So, she was amazed to see me.

Our first meeting was very intense and emotionally charged. Never before had Prudence been asked to talk about what had happened to her. It was like a



© Roger Ross Williams in the UNESCO Courier offices in December 2010

abandoned by my father too, although not to the same extent as Prudence. Every one of us feels admiration for people who succeed in triumphing above their suffering. Prudence did it. And today, she is sending her message loud and clear through her song, 'Never give up'. She was always determined and convinced that life would one day get better. She believes you have to go through the hard times to appreciate your gifts in life.

And your film shows that outcasts can have extraordinary gifts to share.

Disabled children, especially in developing countries – and particularly girls – are the last anyone will pay school fees for, or anything else. They're at the bottom of the pecking order. And yet, every disabled child who is abandoned and cast off represents budding potential. They could grow up to be singers, writers or even the president of the United States.

What has Prudence been doing since the Oscars?

I connected her with Human Rights Watch and several NGOs who support people with disabilities. She has been training, to travel around the world, as an advocate for this cause.

What kind of impact did meeting Prudence have on you?

An enormous impact. Getting close to Prudence made me realise that the things I complained about were actually insignificant. Prudence, she never complains. It put my life into perspective. I'm much more thankful for what I have and all that has gone right for me. And of course, meeting Prudence has had a profound effect on my career. I'm not just speaking about the Oscar. I mean, this film has given my work a whole new dimension: it's become an opportunity to do some good in the world. Hopefully, it will inspire countries, families and everybody to fully appreciate people with disabilities. ■

Visit the website of Prudence Mabhena:
www.musicbyprudence.com/

psychotherapy session. The words just poured out of her. She was in tears. I was in tears. The cameraman was in tears. I knew then it would be one of the most important stories of my life.

I was determined to make it all the way, but met with many roadblocks. Filming in Zimbabwe is a physical challenge. We were never safe from a power outage, so we had to be sure that cameras and projectors were consistently charged. And to make matters worse, it's literally not allowed to film in Zimbabwe. It's lucky that I wasn't arrested or shot during the election, which was a very violent period. Several times we almost got thrown out, and I had to talk my way out of it at the immigration office. But, we were in Prudence's world, a school for disabled children. We weren't doing anything political, and the government knew that.

How did the film change Prudence's life?

Prudence was already a star in her community, performing concerts all over town. But, she wasn't known in the rest of her country. Now, she's certainly one of the most famous women in Zimbabwe. When she arrived back in

the country after the film received an Oscar, she couldn't imagine what to expect. When the plane landed, she saw hundreds of people, dozens of media from all over Africa, and the mayor of Bulawayo waiting to welcome her. As she was carried off the plane, her father was at the foot of its steps on his knees, tears streaming down his face, and begging for forgiveness.

At this time, the mayor declared, "Prudence Mabhena has taught all of us in Zimbabwe that disability does not mean inability, and we must change our attitude towards the disabled." The newspapers resonated this idea, and praised Prudence for putting her country on the map. One notable headline read, "Prudence brings Oscar gold to Zimbabwe." I don't know if the political mentality towards people with disabilities will change, but one thing is sure: Prudence has touched the hearts of many.

What attracted you to this subject?

I often think about outsiders and people who are left behind, forgotten. I identify with being a minority, I always have. Mainly because I've usually been an outsider, myself. So Prudence's story struck a personal chord with me. I was

© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard



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Russian singer Alsou Abramova named UNESCO Artist for Peace

In recognition of her commitment to help the world's most vulnerable people, 28-year-old Russian singer Alsou Abramova, was named UNESCO Artist for Peace on 7 July at a ceremony at UNESCO headquarters.

Her 'Radouga' [Rainbow] Foundation helps restore schools and hospitals, build churches and mosques. The musician also supports several orphanages.

In her new role, Alsou will devote even more attention to education and medical aid for children, as well as building orphanages.

Born in Tatarstan, she won recognition on the Russian musical scene when she was 15 with her first album, *Alsou*. A year later she was chosen to represent Russia at the Eurovision Song Contest in Stockholm (Sweden), where she won second place.

Singer, songwriter, pianist and actor, Alsou joins the list of distinguished Artists for Peace, that includes Céline Dion (Canada), Franghiz Ali-Zadeh (Azerbaijan) and Marcel Khalifé (Lebanon). The title is awarded to internationally renowned personalities who lend a particular resonance to the messages of UNESCO. ■

Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, 2010 for Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers

The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for 2010 was awarded on 14 September 2011, in a ceremony at UNESCO HQ, to *The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, a non-governmental organization, based in Argentina which was represented by Estela de Carlotto, President of the organization. The Prize, which consisted of a cheque for US\$ 150,000, a gold medal and a peace diploma, was awarded by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, in the presence of several Heads of State and of Government: Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina); Alassane Dramane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire); Blaise Compaoré (Burkina Faso); Abdoulaye Wade (Senegal); Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz

(Mauritania); Pascal Irénée Koupaki (Benin) and Brigi Rafini (Niger).

UNESCO chose the organization in recognition of its tireless battle for over thirty years in favour of human rights, justice and peace. It was founded in 1977 to locate the biological families of children kidnapped during the political repression of the military dictatorship in Argentina.

The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize created in 1989 and awarded by UNESCO annually, honours people, institutions and organizations that have contributed significantly to the promotion, research, preservation or maintaining of peace. ■

Humanism in the digital age

'Is the new humanism the response to the scientific and cultural challenges of our time?' This is the theme of a conference organized by the Permanent Delegation of Spain to UNESCO at the Organization's headquarters on 14 and 15 November 2011. The thirty participants will include the Spanish Minister of Culture, Ángeles González-Sinde, Chilean writer, Jorge Edwards, Italian

writer, Roberto Toscano, French philosophers Julia Kristeva and Roger-Pol Droit, Spanish philosophers Adela Cortina and Víctor Gómez Pin, the Senegalese writer, Fatou Diome, as well as other jurists, journalists, scientists and experts. ■

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© Málaga Club de Fútbol



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Promoting peace through sport

The first football match in which the Málaga Club wore UNESCO jerseys was against the Qatari Al-Rayyan Sports Club, on 20 July 2011, in the Marbella Football Centre.

This game was held after the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, and the President of the Málaga Football Club (Málaga CF), Sheikh Abdullah Al-Thani, had signed a four-year agreement at the Picasso Museum in Malaga, Spain, on 1 June 2011, to promote peace through sport, the internet and social media.

A joint commission with representatives of UNESCO and

Málaga CF will develop initiatives to reach these objectives. *La Academia*, the training centre for Malaga CF's youth team, serves as a practical laboratory for the agreement, to inspire young people with a new understanding of peace. The internet and social media will also be used to promote UNESCO's values concerning intercultural dialogue and the importance of education. At present, 15 teams of young footballers aged 6 to 19 (i.e. 500 players in total) are trained there. ■

See the Málaga Club website: www.malagacf.com/?home

UNESCO and Japan come to the aid of Pakistan

The tragic severe floods in Pakistan has triggered UNESCO to launch, in July 2011, a major project in cooperation with the Government of Japan with the aim of upgrading the flood forecasting and early warning systems of Pakistan, and to conduct risk mapping of flood plains along the Indus River. The project will be implemented by UNESCO (Science Sector) in close collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and in coordination with the Government of Pakistan.

The project will benefit from the technical expertise of the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHARM), which developed a concise flood-runoff analysis system as a toolkit for more effective and efficient flood forecasting in developing countries.

Pakistan suffered its most severe floods in living history in 2010. The floods began in late July 2010, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Punjab and Baluchistan regions of Pakistan. ■

Herbie Hancock is appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Herbie Hancock, the prominent US jazz musician, was named as a Goodwill Ambassador by the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, in a ceremony on 22 July, 2011 at UNESCO HQ, for his dedication to the promotion of peace through dialogue, culture and the arts.

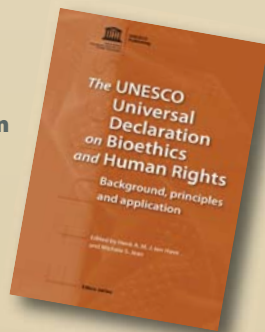
"I watch the news, I vote, I have opinions about the world I am living in. I am living in this world just like everybody else [...] I want to justify my life and the only justification is how you have fought the battle to serve humanity," said Herbie Hancock in an interview during the ceremony.

Now aged 71, the jazz musician was born in Chicago, Illinois, and started with a classical music education from the age of seven. He is now in the fifth decade of his professional career, with an Academy Award for his film score to *Round Midnight* and 14 Grammy Awards. In addition to being recognized as a legendary pianist and composer, Herbie Hancock has been an integral part of every popular music movement since the 1960's. ■

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights *Background, principles and application*

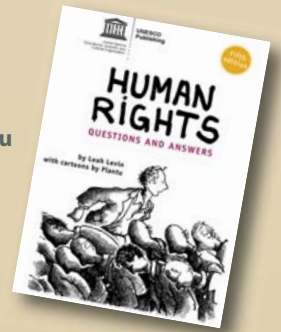
Edited by Henk A. M. J. ten Have and Michèle S. Jean.

In October 2005, UNESCO Member States adopted by acclamation the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. For the first time in the history of bioethics, some 190 countries committed themselves and the international community to respect and apply fundamental ethical principles related to medicine, the life sciences and associated technologies. ■ 2009



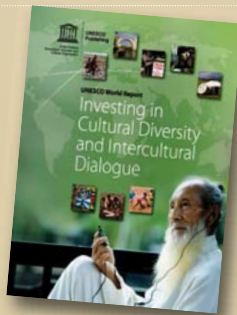
Human Rights: Questions and Answers By Leah Levin with cartoons by Plantu

Human Rights: Questions and Answers provides clear, concise and up-to-date information on human rights standards, mechanisms for their promotion and protection, organizations working for human rights, and major international events. It also includes reflections on the main challenges to human rights. First published in 1981, it has been updated several times and translated into over 30 languages. This revised edition reflects substantial recent developments in the field of human rights. The publication is one of UNESCO's contributions to the International Year of Human Rights Education (2009) and the World Programme for Human Rights Education, launched in 2005. It is a useful guide for anyone interested in the subject and aims to contribute to a universal culture of human rights. ■ 2009



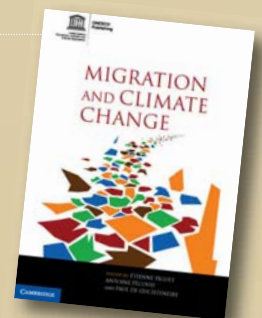
Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue

This report analyzes all aspects of cultural diversity, which has emerged as a key concern of the international community in recent decades, and maps out new approaches to monitoring and shaping the changes that are taking place. It highlights, in particular, the interrelated challenges of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and the way in which strong homogenizing forces are matched by persistent diversifying trends. The report proposes a series of ten policy-oriented recommendations, for the attention of States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, international and regional bodies, national institutions and the private sector on how to invest in cultural diversity. ■ 2009



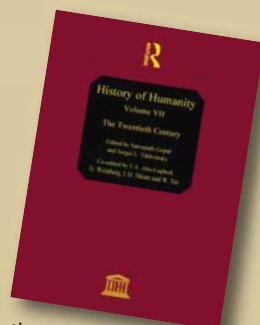
Migration and Climate Change Edited by Étienne Piguet, Antoine Pécoud and Paul de Guchteneire

Migration and Climate Change provides the first authoritative overview of the relationship between climate change and migration, bringing together both case studies and syntheses from different parts of the world. It discusses policy responses, normative issues and critical perspectives from the point of view of human rights, international law, political science, and ethics, and addresses the concepts, notions and methods most suited to confronting this complex issue. ■ 2011



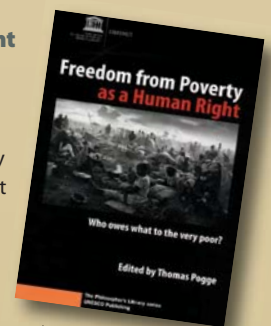
History of Humanity Volume VII: The Twentieth Century Edited by Sarvepalli Gopal and Sergei L. Tikhvinsky

The product of almost fifteen years of intense effort, the seven-volume *History of Humanity* is a radically new work that sheds light on hitherto unknown historical events, in the light of new facts and methods of historiographical investigation. This major undertaking required an International Commission and the co-operation of some 450 distinguished specialists from all over the world. The seventh volume is devoted to the history of the 20th century. ■ 2008



Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right *Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* Edited by Thomas Pogge

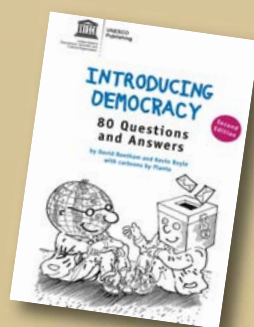
Collected here are fifteen cutting-edge essays by leading academics about the severe poverty that today afflicts billions of human lives. The essays seek to explain why freedom from poverty is a human right and what duties this right creates for the affluent. Addressing even the most complex aspects of human rights in clear language, these discussions are accessible to specialists and lay readers alike. ■ 2007



Introducing Democracy: 80 Questions and Answers By David Beetham and Kevin Boyle with cartoons by Plantu

What is democracy? What is the relation between democracy and individual rights? Is majority rule always democratic? How can democracy be maintained and improved?

This revised edition also takes into account new challenges facing our societies, from international terrorism to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. ■ 2009



Migration and Human Rights *The United Nations Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights* Edited by Paul de Guchteneire, Antoine Pécoud and Ryszard Cholewinski

The International Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights is one of the UN's main human rights treaties. It sets a standard in terms of access to human rights for migrant workers and their families. Yet hardly more than 40 states have ratified it and no major developed country has done so. Although migrant labour is essential in the world economy, the human aspect of migration - and especially migrants' rights - remains a neglected dimension of globalization. ■ 2009



The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity celebrates its 10th anniversary

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted on 2 November 2001, raises cultural diversity to the level of "the common heritage of humanity [...] as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" and makes its defence an ethical imperative indissociable from respect for the dignity of the individual.



Detail from the
poster for the
UNESCO
Universal
Declaration on
Cultural Diversity.

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