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Abstracts

Jack Goody
Democracy, Values and Modes of Representation

This paper argues that the emergence of humanistic values is not a purely modern phenomenon. If by humanism we refer to secular learning and the development of science, there were periods in the history of Islam when this was encouraged. Humanism in the sense of the respect for 'human values' such as democracy is equally widely distributed in time and space, so that the idea that the West, as heirs of Ancient Greece, has a monopoly is quite untenable. Tribal societies often practise versions of direct democracy; representation is an aspect of many more complex regimes. Even with monarchical states, few can afford to neglect public opinion over the longer term. Modern representative democracies moreover often fail to consult their people on major issues such as declaring war. In any case that is only one mode of representation among others and does not have the monopoly of virtue, especially in religiously divided communities. Elsewhere it may be adopted as a legitimating device in a specific context, as I suggested had been the case with Israel.

Edwar Al-Kharrat
Cultural Authenticity and National Identity

Culture is determined by a historical, that is, a temporal perspective, and by another that is atemporal, the transcendental scale of values. Diversity, within the limits of a certain harmony that embraces the whole, is an enriching factor far more than one tending to dispersal or division. The ancient Egyptian and Coptic, Muslim and modern heritage in Egypt and black Africa, as well as the Assyrians', Phoenicians', Berbers', and then the legacy from black Africa coming from Mesopotamia, the Levant, North Africa, Sudan and Somalia respectively, are contributing to the emergence of a new though historical humanism. The author takes the view that the Arab mentality, contrary to a common and widely held belief, is nourished by a pluralism that is both surprising and stimulating.

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Michel Maffesoli
Utopia or Utopias in the Gaps: From the Political to the 'Domestic'

There is a question mark hanging over the two great markers of modern civilization in the so-called Judeo-Christian, or more accurately Semitic-western-modern tradition: monotheism is the first of these two great markers. The second is the Project, that is, the idea that real life is elsewhere, messianism. Life must be saved, healed. Based on this structural schizophrenia and this transcendent project can we talk about a humanism? Our western civilization has reached saturation point. This saturation is expressed in a polytheism of values. We should no longer search for a distant utopia, but utopias in the gaps, existential 'makeshift' forms, close at hand, that promote something like the emotional, the domestic. It is more a question of re-emerging humanisms, pantheisms, polytheisms, something structurally plural. A re-orientalization as well, an alternative to the monovalency of western culture.

Aminata Diaw
New Contours of Public Space in Africa

There are several Africas; the continent does not have a single homogeneous reality. Instead we should talk of shifting territorialities. The crucial questions, when thinking about emergent humanisms, have to do with the exegesis of the political, and at its heart democracy, citizenship and the management of violence, which obstinately appears as a constant in the political experience in Africa. It operates as one of the political idioms at the very moment when democracy is becoming essential as a universal, unavoidable reference. The African state seems unable any longer to guarantee its citizens' security. The human body is becoming an integral part of the territories where conflict is occurring. What is being challenged is the sovereignty of the state, which means that the symbolic construction of a people transforming the state into a nation state is no longer possible. So how can we imagine a space for interaction where collective issues are put up for discussion? The case of Côte d'Ivoire, the reform of the Family Code in Senegal, and the tragedy in Rwanda are examined. The author wishes to follow the perspective set out by Wiredu, the principle of compassionate impartiality, the principle on which moral universality is based and built up.

Liubava Moreva
Essay on the Phenomenon of Indifference

The human race is defined in relation to the search for the meaning of life, but it is human beings' search itself that constructs this meaning. As against the definition of the individual as a product of society (20th-century determinism) an integral being is sought in the intuition of Russian spirituality. Ethics is the foundation stone of everything: thought brings together within itself moral, artistic and ontological principles that help one to understand life at the level of personal participation. Between

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prosaic illuminism (which is the logical source of modern consumerism) and romantic poetry (which attempts to understand the ineffable nature of life), it can be argued that personal development and historical events are complementary. Life is tragic. Spinoza, Kant and Nietzsche, when trying to understand the tragedy of human life (its meaninglessness), applied three form of 'distancing', and so bypassed suffering. Thus the meaning of life lies in the battles fought on behalf of great hopes in a world of suffering.

Jérôme Bindé
'Human, Still Human!'

For more than a century the shifts in western thought have witnessed: the death of God, the demise of political ideologies that appeared to have taken over from 'divine' values, and the solitude of the disoriented individual. The individual's malaise may be the symptom of a questioning of the very notion of being human. Adopting the critique of humanism introduced by Nietzsche, Sloterdijk highlights the fact that human beings may have escaped bestiality by the very means they use to tame animals to serve them. What should we say of what research currently allows us to do on human beings? Manipulation of the living has allowed us to glimpse the possibility of a factory for the human. The choices we shall have to make as to the future of the human remain above all political. The word 'humanism' is complex: there are two types of humanism. One thinks of the human as an essence. The second form considers that there is no human nature: we *become* human. The human world is open to creation, but fragile because it is placed under our responsibility.

Andrzej Szahaj
Postmodern Liberalism as a New Humanism

John Gray argues that the modern conception of man is common for all variants of the liberal tradition. The version of liberalism which is defended in this paper cannot be called 'classical' because it refuses the conception in question (it refuses such elements of it as, for example, claims of universality, idea of neutral Reason, idea of human nature). That is why the best label which can be given to it is 'postmodern' or 'communitarian' liberalism. Moreover, postmodern liberalism does not express any reluctance toward community as such. It only requires a community which respects the rights of individuals to autonomous, moral and comprehensive choices. In this sense one can say that postmodern liberalism renounces anti-social biases while remaining faithful to individualism, which – starting with the social and the common – arrives at the truly individual. In this way it can revitalize the sense and meaning of humanism understood as the idea of life of human beings who can create their own lives independently and freely in the political and social milieu, promoting justice and solidarity.

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Muniz Sodré
For a Feeling Humanism: The Political Emergence of the Emotions

If the revival of humanism depends on closing the gap between differences, western and eastern perspectives on the world diverge: the first uses History as its guide and the second uses the notion of destiny. Between the logical power of western instrumental rationalism and the affective power of the feeling modes of knowledge like liturgy and music, the West should be able to accept difference and reject both closed identities and absolute alterities.

Joseph Yacoub
For an Enlargement of Human Rights

If we investigate the concept of the universality of human rights, we realize that it is limited and invalid, and that it fails because it is too utopian and unreal. It is not a question of denying that there is a generic human essence, or criticizing human rights from a moral standpoint, but of showing that 'human rights' do not really have a universal basis. They are a part of history, and as such they vary according to societies and develop differently across space, time and moment. The values that underlie human rights are relative and evolving. They take distinctive forms according to cultures and social context, and are likely to be modified according to societies and periods. In other words, in this area there is no universal societal code that would be approved and recognized everywhere. Therefore the statement of rights cannot fail to be marked by their context. Each civilization has its codes and keywords influenced by its *Weltanschauung*. This paper attempts to place human rights texts in their historical and geographical context, and thereby demonstrate that there is nothing constant about them. They are dependent on cultures and collective imaginaries, national representations and social determinants, and rely heavily on their instrumentalization by states. For this reason we need to rethink the relationship between the particular and the universal in order to widen their humanistic base.

Mohammed Arkoun
Thinking the Mediterranean Arena Today

This paper proposes a historical and anthropological re-reading of the Mediterranean arena over and above all the lines of thought and action that have directed its history, in particular since Islam's emergence as a conquering force. The political theologies of Islam and Christianity have operated as ideologies legitimating Islam's conquests between 632 and 1258, then 1453–1830 or thereabouts. Rivalry continues today, with the two great symbolic figures of the struggle between Good and Evil: *JIHÂD versus McWORLD.* Few archeological analyses of religions, then modernity, as legitimating ideologies have been offered. This essay takes its place in this perspective, which has been made indispensable by 9/11 and the vengeful reactions of

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the Holy Alliance against terrorist barbarity. Its aim is to strengthen intellectually the quest for a horizon of meaning, hope and action in order finally to enter an era of history where there is solidarity with peoples beyond the powerful wealthy states, which show little understanding for societies, whether rich or underdeveloped, that are historically out of phase with modernity.

Rafael Argullol
Towards a Polycentric Humanism

Western tradition has always been fundamentally anthropocentric. With the scientific mind, modern humans have achieved a sort of colonization of the rest of nature, where only their own benefit makes any sense. This conception has been in a period of crisis since the second half of the 20th century, particularly the final third, and we are witnessing the toppling of some of the ontological principles that made western humanity. Greek philosophy, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Renaissance, these are the three great moments of this anthropocentrism; the fourth was human domination of nature and the cosmos. Since the second half of the 20th century this situation has produced a counter-consciousness, western anthropocentrism's consciousness of *hybris*, the awareness of having overstepped every limit and every frontier with the self-destruction brought by the atom bomb. The dual posture of pride and fall into *hybris* forms the grand philosophical backdrop to the ethical, political and ideological debates that are currently going on around developments in biology and genetics. This being so, is it possible for human beings, in philosophical, intellectual and artistic terms, to transcend anthropocentrism? Yes, it is, through self-restraint, the ancient *sofrosyne*, which demanded moderation when faced with *hybris*. But westerners are afraid of transcending anthropocentrism; the idea that humans are nothing strikes fear into their hearts (pancosmic cold). An intermediate way is wanted: we need to rediscover awareness of a certain animism, rediscover the soul of the world.

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