

Unism and Humanism

Pavel B. Ivanov

E-mail: *unism@narod.ru*

Written: 3 Nov 1996

Humanist ideas have a long history, and their origin might be traced up to the earliest epochs of human spirituality. However, the birth of humanism as a distinct ideological trend can be attributed to the dawn of capitalism, the dominant socioeconomic system of today. The periods of active development of humanism generally coincided with the periods of revolutionary transformations in the economy or social structure in some region of the “civilized” world. The technological revolution of the last decades of the XX century has also lead to vast social changes in most countries, accompanied with the tide of the humanist movement. This modern branch of humanism may, for instance, be represented by the American Humanist Association, and its basic principles have been clearly summarized by Frederick Edwords, the executive director of AHA, in his speech at the Harvard Science Center, on February 14, 1993. This text will often be meant in the following analysis of humanism from the unism point of view.

There are many features in humanism, which attract people to it. The attention to the personality, the claim for freedom, happiness and the unfolding of the abilities of each person cannot fail to be appreciated by the intellectuals, while the call for equality, justice and human rights appeals to the poorer layers of society. The desire to help people and to make life better right now, in very practical and down-to-earth ways, seems to be quite sincere and good-intended, and perfectly matching with the aims of practical psychology and psychotherapy. Humanism promises people diverse and joyful life, without guilt and fears, without doubts and strife. No wonder that people are moved to such philosophy, which seems to give everything without almost any demands. Just forget your past, and deny your responsibility for the future—just live for yourself, here and now.

However, a closer investigation reveals fundamental problems. Thus, the plentiful life promised by humanism, is much resembling the life of cattle, chewing their forage and never thinking of anything global. Living here and now means severe deprivation of the world, inability to feel its infinity in space and time—and consequently, inability to feel infinity and eternity in oneself. The narrower is the person’s “today”, the less of the personality proper is left. “*Time is the space of human development,*” Karl Marx said. A person has to penetrate deep into the past, and to foresee the distant future—otherwise one cannot remain a *human* being and retain subjectivity. In this light, humanism appears to suggest people freedom from their human essence, freedom from themselves.

The other side of it is that if somebody refuses to think about the purpose of one’s life, somebody else will do it for that person. The cattle becomes live-stock, skillfully directed by the shepherd. The masters are interested in peaceful obedience—and they will keep the cattle too busy living their happiness, to prevent any unexpected turn, or, maybe, revolution. If something goes wrong, people are taught to reconsider their attitudes, rather than their environment—and the only change allowed is the change in one’s self. Humanism is most advantageous for the ruling class, and this may be one of the reasons why most humanists have been paid enough to imagine themselves free from the necessities of life.

Since the humanist view of the people identifies them with the animals, it is quite natural that the personality is tied to the individual in humanism, without any mentioning the social nature of any subjectivity. People are encouraged to act, to behave—but completely for their individual goals. This may be not merely physical pleasures that attract a humanist: there are also the pleasures of making new discoveries, solving problems, and creating; there is the enjoyment of art, music, dance, and drama; there is the joy of helping others and the challenge of working to make the world a better and more peaceful place. But all this is only for individual entertainment—and it does not matter what to

do if one finds fun in it. From this point of view, a sadist tormenting his victims acts in a quite humanistic way, since he does it for his own pleasure, never regarding the feelings of the others.

The natural consequence of identifying people with animals is that, since the humanity was closer to the animal state in the past, it should have felt better then, from the humanist point of view. The typical feature of humanism is the idealization and embellishment of the past, with its “simple pleasures”, its “wholeness and the integration of life”, or “seeing much of life as play”. Humanists do not see that the simplicity of a troglodyte was just dullness caused by the too hard and dangerous life, the spiritual achievements of the Ancient Greece were based on the severe oppression of numerous slaves, and the ceremonial playfulness of the ancient Chinese was cultivated by the ruling classes only, having nothing to do with the miserable life of the silent millions who paid with their lives for those plays.

This is one of the reasons why the ruling classes feel so much relieved when humanism forgives them their past and teaches to forget the fear of the future, when the oppressed masses would stop this unjust well-being.

The therapeutic efficiency of the humanist philosophy cannot be denied. Accepting the viewpoint of humanism, people do feel better—for a while. However, life cannot be changed by self-suggestion, and the effect of humanist therapy cannot last for long without ever new exercises in the world denial. Thus the rejection of rituals becomes a ritual itself. The final goal of this “path to perfection” is the complete decay of personality, a kind of nirvana, when one may move and act feeling no need for that, no desire or pain, no memory or intention—a ghost of the person. Many religions are quite humanistic in that.

There is another attitude to the problem of human happiness, suggested by *unism*, which treats the personality in a different way, relating it to the universal activity. This approach retains all the positive content of humanism, purifying it of the primitive individualism and social inadequacy. Unism says that an action may only be *human* if it represents the objective line of development, leading to more integrity in the world. Such actions reveal the eternal and infinite in the mortal and finite people, making them feel the deepest satisfaction and the sublime pleasure. Any real behavior manifests both universal and situational aspects—the former showing the human side of it, while the latter linking the subject to the animal origin.

In the understanding of unism, a person may only be called so with respect to the creative side of activity, and the humanist “zest for living” (read: consumption) is replaced with the “zest for creation” (which assumes production first and foremost). While the only humanist goal is happiness, unism states that the goals should be taken from the real life—and happiness will come just as an indication of the right choice.

Of course, such happiness may be much more difficult than the dull happiness of humanism. Under specific social conditions, it may lead to more suffering than pleasure. The scope of happiness is enormously extended—covering the tragic forms, yes—but giving a person more possibilities to be happy.

Unism does not promise quick solutions for human problems, it just says that people should solve them in a universal way, aiming to the elimination of the problem’s cause, rather than a temporary relief for an individual. Yes, it cannot give fast therapeutic results, when an individual case is concerned. More of that, the way to a better situation may require struggle accompanied with more pain than that the lasting disease would deliver. However, a therapist following unism is more honest with those who need help, while the humanist therapy is like trying to cure all the maladies with sedative pills.

The universality of the activity means sociality as an indispensable component. “Occupied by oneself, one most rarely, and hardly ever with the benefit for oneself and the others, satisfies one’s aspiration for happiness”, F. Engels said. No problem can be solved on the individual basis, since every person can manifest its personality in the relations with the other people only. So, there is no individual happiness—one cannot be happy for the expense of the other. True happiness is a result of an action

which is of universal importance, giving more happiness to the humanity as a whole. Any other happiness is bound to be mixed with guilt.

Humanists describe happiness as “wellness”, so that its prerequisite is an absence of disease. However, a conscious person cannot be always “well”. To be disturbed by the pains of the humanity is one of the most human features. There cannot be “well-balanced” life in the world that is *not* well-balanced. To be not ill in the ill society means the crudest distortion of the human essence. From the unism viewpoint, each person acts as a representative of all the people, and the feelings may only be called human if they represent the universal content of people’s feelings, on the current level of social development. This does not mean that one should always seek for the approval of others—social approval or disapproval are just the indications of the urgency of the task. One should not live for others, or for oneself,—one should lives for eternity.

Another practical consequence of the unism approach is the dependence of the people’s abilities of action (and therefore their access to the different kinds of happiness) on the social conditions in which people live. The poorer layers of society have much less possibilities than those who control the major part of the public wealth. “Life should be experienced deeply, lived fully, with sensitive awareness and appreciation of that which is around us”, humanists say. But life just cannot be lived fully, if there is no way to do it. The middle-class ideologists of humanism cannot imagine the conditions in which any germ of consciousness is strongly suppressed by the severe struggle for physical survival, for shelter and food. Many people whose personality has formed in such unfavorable conditions cannot dispose of the fears caused by the uncertainty of the future during all their life, even if they manage to get rich.

Anxiety over the future spoils the present, and so does guilt over the past. But it’s no use to just refuse to be anxious if there are the objective grounds for that—this would mean driving the problem into the unconscious. The human way is to clearly realize the situation and to seek for the most human ways of action available. Such actions leave no guilt behind, and there will be no need for a ritual of expiation.

From the unism point of view, unhappiness cannot be attributed to the mistaken views of the world, irrational ideas or wrong habits of life. If the world is bad, it should be felt as such by a person living in it. Otherwise, there can be no productive action. Of course, one can be mistaken about something, which is normally repaired by more open-minded, unprejudiced interaction with the world. But one cannot annihilate the objective circumstances by imagining that they do not exist. Mere desire is not enough, and it even cannot be a prerequisite, since no desire can grow on an empty place, being called forth by the specific circumstances.

Accordingly, perception and motivation are socially dependent. One could paint a graphic and beautiful picture of the good life, and the good society (as one sees it)—but this picture will not necessarily look as attractive to others and become a strongly desired goal for them. There should be the objective grounds for such social acceptance, meaning that the change is in progress already. Emotions and motives indicate the start of the process, the existence of the corresponding force—but they cannot be the true cause for that. Revolutions cannot be provoked by manipulating the public opinion, by whipping up a fury of desire or fanning the flames of discontent. Revolutions occurs when the development cannot proceed further in a smooth way, when the old order has lost its progressive resource, its universal content.

While humanism says: “Act now!”—unism adds: “Act the right way!” While humanism says: “Don’t wait for happiness, create it”—unism objects: “Don’t seek for happiness, just do what you should do—and happiness will come”. Life cannot be short for those who feel the eternity in every one’s action, no matter how ordinary it may be. There is no need in any life after death, since all one creates now is forever. One does not need to think of the meaning of life—this meaning grows from the universal nature of activity driven by the objective course of development, and the eternity is its only measure.

Unism reject the abstract understanding of the human nature and human rights, which is characteristic of humanism. There is no other human nature than that reveals itself in productive creativity and

social relations. There are no human rights other than determined by the economical position of a social layer. There is a universal criterion of human nature applicable to every single action—universality. The humanity has not got too far away from the animal state so far—but it is ever developing, and every universal act of every person makes the whole humanity more human.

[*http://unism.pjwb.net/arc*](http://unism.pjwb.net/arc)

[*http://unism.pjwb.org/arc*](http://unism.pjwb.org/arc)

[*http://unism.narod.ru/arc*](http://unism.narod.ru/arc)