

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMANISM

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# *The Affirmation of Life*

## 1. THE ETHICS OF HUMANISM

In the Humanist ethics the chief end of thought and action is to further this-earthly human interests on behalf of the greater glory of people. The watchword of Humanism is happiness for all humanity in this existence as contrasted with salvation for the individual soul in a future existence and the glorification of a supernatural Supreme Being. Humanism urges us to accept freely and joyously the great boon of life and to realize that life in its own right and for its own sake can be as beautiful and splendid as any dream of immortality.

The philosophy of Humanism constitutes a profound and passionate affirmation of the joys and beauties, the braveries and idealisms, of existence upon this earth. It heartily welcomes all life-enhancing and healthy pleasures, from the vigorous enjoyments of youth to the contemplative delights of mellowed age, from the simple gratifications of food and drink, sunshine and sports, to the more complex appreciation of art and literature, friendship and social communion. Humanism believes in the beauty of love and the love of beauty. It exults in the pure magnificence of external Nature. All the many-sided possibilities for good in human living the Humanist would weave into a sustained pattern of happiness under the guidance of reason.

In this Humanist affirmation of life the monistic psychology again plays a most significant role. For this view means

that in whatever human beings do we are a living unity of body and personality, an interfunctioning oneness of mental, emotional, and physical qualities. Humanism adheres to the highest ethical ideals and fosters the so-called goods of the spirit, such as those of culture and art and responsible citizenship. At the same time it insists that all ideals and values are grounded in this world of human experience and natural forms. As Santayana puts it in summing up his conception of human nature, "everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development."<sup>118</sup>

Much of the emphasis in supernaturalist ethics has been negative, calling on people continually to deny many of their most wholesome impulses in order to keep their souls pure and undefiled for that life after death which is so very much more important than life before death. In this ethics the prospect of supernatural rewards and punishments in the future overshadows present conduct; the values decreed by supernatural authority override those of the natural and temporal order in which we actually live.

By contrast, the emphasis of Humanist and naturalistic ethics is *positive*.<sup>\*</sup> It is an ethics in which conscience does not merely play the role of a vetoing censor, but is creative in the sense of bringing to the fore new and higher values. This system of morality recommends the greater and more frequent enjoyment of earthly goods on the part of all people everywhere; it repudiates ascetic other-worldliness in favor of buoyant this-worldliness; it is against all defeatist systems which either postpone happiness to an after-existence or recommend acquiescence to social injustice in this existence.