

An Indictment: Summa Contra Humanismus

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{In the essay, I have tried to do justice to the fundamentalist attack on Humanism. Citations are from *Humanist Manifestos* I (1933) and II (1973). Full texts are available through the American Humanist Association or from Prometheus Press.

Reference below is to the fictional St. Thomas Aquarius. I apologize for taking in vain the name of the foremost of the Church Fathers, St. Thomas Aquinas. His scholastic style which I imitate-poorly-was a form of medieval argument in which a thesis was set beside the views of those who opposed it. Then, replies were made to the opposition and a final conclusion drawn reaffirming the original thesis. The method permitted the author to mobilize arguments in cogent form. I trust this "fragment" (which was only discovered in the cave of my mind) will help initiate the discussion which follows it.

I have also noted the relevant essay in this issue of *Humanism Today* in the parenthesis next to the particular thesis advanced by St. Thomas.}

1. The Humanist Satan

It is ironic that a demonic role is assigned to Humanism by fundamentalists. Given its minute size and fragmented organization, the attribution of political, moral, cultural, and educational power to Humanism suggests four possibilities.

a) It may be that Humanism is indeed powerful and that its appearance of weakness is merely a strategic ploy. Evidence

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for this is lacking but then the very absence of evidence may be taken as verification of the insidious cleverness of Humanists.

b) Second, it may be that Humanism's enemies are simply dishonest. Unwilling to admit their inadequacies, the alleged strength of Humanism gives them an alibi for failure.

c) A third possibility is the need for an enemy or what has been called the "paranoid" style in American politics. This need, however, is genuinely felt. The fundamentalist truly believes that he or she is under attack. Humanism, as it were, completes the fundamentalist story by its existence. Were it not to exist, it would have to be invented.

d) Finally, Humanism serves as a convenient label for a number of modern historic trends. Attacks on Humanism are a rejection of the modern world, i.e., a cultural criticism.

The first of these possibilities is simply funny to those of us who live with the precariousness of Humanist organizations. I simply cannot take this possibility seriously and I suspect that many who accuse Humanism of institutional deception aren't serious either. At the same time, I do not believe that, by and large, Humanism's enemies are lying although I'm sure there are enough Fundamentalist racketeers around so that lying is worthy of a minority report. The third of these possibilities goes a long way to explain the vitriol of the attack on Humanism. Fundamentalism needs a vulnerable enemy. For example, in an age that is nearly idolatrous about "science," it is strategically more effective to attack Humanism than to attack science. It is revealing in this regard that creationists talk about "creation science." Evolution is "mere theory" and the claim that it is the "truth" of things natural is evidence not of science but of a Humanist plot to seize the minds of the young. Similarly, with the disappearance of the "evil empire" (Mr. Reagan's communism), the psychological invention of a replacement becomes urgent. Other candidates

have disappeared too or have become socially unacceptable as villains, e.g. pagans, witches and Jews who once played this role in the drama.

It is, then, the fourth possibility that I want to take seriously, i.e. the use of Humanism as a name for secularity, social democracy, free inquiry, naturalism, and multi-nationalism. In other words, this fourth possibility identifies Humanism with Enlightenment modernism. Fundamentalism, then, may be said to be a rejection of the contemporary world itself. The Fundamentalist narrative-although not the practice-is based in nostalgia for days gone by (although they didn't go by quite as warmly and lovingly as fundamentalists imagine).

Of course, most of us agree that contemporary society faces moral, political, and economic problems which are powerfully resistant to solutions. Disarray is more likely than community; disparities between haves and have nots-domestically and globally-are growing; individuals are likely to find themselves without dependable emotional and psychological resources as families and friendships fragment; and technology is a readily available tool of manipulation and destruction. In short, it is more likely than not that modern experience will be read "through a glass darkly" and that the progress whose praises were sung by the 18th Century will today be treated as a failed promise. Now, whether Humanism is among the causes of these events deserves analysis.

2. The Indictment

The indictment of Humanism rests on a single and seminal point. As Dostoevsky put it, "If God is dead, then all things are permitted." It is necessary to add that Humanists do not simply announce the "death of God" but enjoy making the announcement. What follows is the problem of meaning and stability, the problem confronted by modern existentialism for example. And, given the mood of our announcement, we invite those whose

foundations are destroyed to move from sadness to bitterness to anger. The Humanist, as it were, is not merely incorrect but betrays a lack of sensitivity to the situation of so many fellow human beings.

It is necessary, furthermore, to avoid reducing God to a simple-minded anthropomorphic image. Three claims are associated with God in human experience. First, God insures the existence of the world, provides a background reality of order, structure and permanence for a natural reality that is as disorderly as it is orderly, and that is ultimately impermanent. Second, God offers assurance to persons, not so much by warranting good outcomes but by acting as a source of meaning and purpose. Absent God, and human history becomes an incidental collection of events, no more understandable than the fall of a stone. Third, God makes the natural universe intelligible. God is the "beginning and the end," the point of initiation (creation) and of destiny (purpose). Without God, the universe is but an accident. Accidents may be described, even causally connected, but they cannot be explained. Indeed, it may not be a universe at all or even the "pluriverse" that William James talked about.

In place of God whom the Humanist announces as departed-not dearly departed, I note again-the Humanist offers weak and unsatisfying suggestions. First, given Humanist premises, they can only be suggestions-the more elaborate word, "hypothesis" adds nothing to the meaning except a claim of frequency-since the Humanist affirms the likelihood of error in all matters large and small. That, after all, is the import of a reliance on the sciences. Humanist naturalism simply names accident as reality or to put this bluntly, whatever happens happens. But it could have happened otherwise or not have happened at all. And that includes my own existence, the existence of those whom I love and to whom I am loyal, the existence of the universe itself whatever that may be. Necessity vanishes and with that dependability as well.

Moreover, the Humanist lives in the natural world. When all is said and done, this secularity reduces social and cultural life to the anarchic outcomes of historic accidents as the "post-modernists" maintain. As arbitrary as happenings in the natural world, the politics of interests and powers replace justice and reason. And this is the final irony of the Humanist position for, by removing transcendence from the world, justice and reason become merely justifications and rationalizations for the strong to use over the weak. In a secular world, in other words, history is indeed the story of the victors who may, incidentally, be more or less benign or more or less vicious toward their victims.

3. A Scholastic Fragment

{From an incomplete manuscript by St. Thomas Aquarius}

1. Without immortality there is no morality (See, Jane F. Koretz, *"The New Outsiders"*)

We notice that licentiousness prevails in both personal and public conduct. Freedom cannot exist without order and authority. And the corruption of freedom appears as the deterioration of social morality and has led, among other things, to the epidemic spread of the scourge of AIDS. We may even take this disease as a metaphor for the loss of a sense of immortality: it reveals that eternity is replaced by instant-and indifferent-gratification.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from social actualization and from rectifying social injustices... (Humanist Manifesto II, Second)

"We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest... (Humanist Manifesto II, Third)

"Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possess. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific methods, which have transformed the natural and social sciences since the Renaissance, must be extended further in the solution of human problems."
(*Humanist Manifesto II*, Fourth)

But we reply.

The motive for "rectifying social injustice" is either a matter of expedience-e.g. those who are its victims may grow annoying in one way or another and must be controlled-or a matter of moral principle. If the latter, then it is difficult to see how a moral principle "derive(d) from human experience" can be intelligible or reliable since human experience is not one but many, not coherent but conflicted. And this is precisely why social injustice arises. Indeed, the very idea of social injustice calls for a background of stable moral value on which grounds something can be known as just or unjust. Moreover, even if known, action follows on motivation and not just knowledge. Here "interest," another claimed source of Humanist morality, is conflicted too since it may be to my (our) interest to benefit from injustice. Finally, without "faith and passion," the move from knowledge to judgment to action does not occur. Faith is urgent since any act is a move into an unknowable future and only by faith can that move be secure enough to be undertaken.

Thus, only as transcendent Being insures the stability of moral values and only as faith provides for the future is morality possible.

II. Without authority there can be no democracy.
(See Harvey B. Sarles, *"The Religious Attack on Science"*)

A society of angels would not need authority since angels are perfectly good and rational by definition. But among men and

women, authority is necessary since men and women are mixed creatures, good and rational, but also evil and irrational. Authority, however, is of two kinds. First is the authority of power, which arises from the differences between strength and weakness. Second is the authority of virtue which arises from a source that is independent of evil and irrationality. Since all that is in the natural world is caught in a mixture of interests and desires, so nothing in the natural and secular world can exercise the authority of virtue. Without that exercise, however, democracy becomes merely a matter of collective power, i.e. an alliance of the weak over the strong.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Religious Humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. The intelligent evaluation, transformation, control, and direction of such associations and institutions with a view to the enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of Humanism " (Humanist Manifesto I, Thirteenth)

"We are committed to an open and democratic society. We must extend participatory democracy in its true sense to the economy, the school, the family, the workplace, and voluntary associations. Decision-making must be decentralized to include widespread involvement of people at all levels-social, political, and economic. All persons should have a voice in developing the values and goals that determine their lives..." (Humanist Manifesto II, Eighth)

But, we reply.

The "fulfillment of human life" conceals the conflicts that must arise when, in order to fulfill my life, I must limit or even destroy the fulfillment of yours. In a merely natural world, one without eternity, such conflict must exist. Moreover, "participatory democracy" presumes two things: that all participants are willing without coercion to invite the participation of all other partici-

pants; and that all participants are qualified to participate. On the former point, its mere statement reveals its prior condition. Somewhere, an authority must insure participation. Else, the mixed and conflicted natural being would find it to his/her interest to deny participation to some and grant it to others. On the latter point, some judgement is needed as to qualification for participation. Without it, a sufficiently large aggregate of unqualified human beings will produce precisely those outcomes they wish to produce and thereby deny the fulfillment of others. Humanism is thus in conflict with itself and its claims are contradictory.

In other words, without secured authority-transcendent, objective-participation becomes tyranny in the guise of democracy.

III. Without property there is no freedom. (See Howard B. Radest, *"The Death And Birth Of A Dream"*)

Property signifies the ability of a person to determine his/her existence, to be self-determined or free. Without the ownership of property, the person is at the mercy of those with ownership of food, clothing, shelter-and being at the mercy of another is the contradictory of freedom. Humanism has either ignored this connection between property and freedom or else has called for shared property in the name of social justice. To this it gives the name "social democracy" but its real name is totalitarianism, i.e. it locates freedom in collectives and these are but masks for interests and powers. Moreover, in a secular society, such collectives have nothing but prudential or expedient reasons for their acts, i.e. the aggregation of enough persons to exercise control for the sake of their interests and without need to attend to the interests of the remainder. Such aggregation need not even add up to a majority if sufficient power can be aggregated by a minority as the history of history reveals. The secular test is the strength that produces victory and not the goodness of the cause.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"The Humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate... A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible..." (Humanist Manifesto I, Fourteenth)

"...We need to democratize the economy and judge it by its responsiveness to human needs, testing results in terms of the common good." (Humanist Manifesto II, Tenth)

"The world community must engage in cooperative planning concerning the use of rapidly depleting resources. The planet earth must be considered a single ecosystem..." (Humanist Manifesto II, Fourteenth)

"The problems of economic growth and development can no longer be resolved by one nation alone, they are worldwide in scope. It is the moral obligation of the developed nations to provide-through an international authority that safeguards human rights-massive technical agricultural, medical, and economic assistance, including birth control techniques, to the developing portions of the globe, World poverty must cease. Hence, extreme disproportions in wealth, income, and economic growth should be reduced on a worldwide basis." (Humanist Manifesto II, Fifteenth)

But, we reply:

The invocation of justice echoes weakly where power is in the hands of collectives. We must conclude, therefore, that Humanism has forgotten the history of corporate secular authorities-nations and international authorities-which have never done more than reflect the interests of their rulers. Or else Humanism has ignored common sense since we are now told that the achievement of equity and the suppression of greed are to be accomplished by such collective powers even against the wishes of individual persons. Even were we to accede to the notion of a

beneficent collective-the reality of which we have yet to see demonstrated-we would notice that such beneficence would have to be imposed. Indeed, the Humanist in denying the right of property uses the language of imposition, of unfreedom, everywhere.

And we also note that the source of beneficence is the very being who is "greedy" and "acquisitive" since Humanism acknowledges no other source. And if this be so-as would seem to be the view of Humanism-then some power outside the secular arena of takers and users is required. But this cannot merely be the collection of the very takers and users whose acts make inequity and unfreedom possible.

IV. Without eternity there is no future. (See Vern and Bonnie Bullough, *"Is There A Moral Decay?"*)

Eternity is the ever-present, the present without the interference of time; it is, quite literally, timelessness. And it is within the timeless in all its unimaginable expanse, that the future is understood as the never completed step from moment to moment. Without eternity, each step is like very other, mere motion without point or purpose, and so we are left without understanding.

The future is found in the hopes and loves and doings of human families who are, as it were, the future embodied. But how shall human families as embodied futures be understood? Either they are merely biological accidents, the melding of genotypes in incidental configurations, or they have meanings. But whence those meanings if all is in flux and nothing outside of flux stands in judgement. The future is, after all, a direction and not simply a changing temporality. Concretely, either the family tends somewhere or else is only another blind event. And if the latter, then how-other than as a mechanism of self perpetuation--can arise the moral point of family life, the exercise of love for the sake of the other. Amoral point of view does not arise; the future is without moral quality.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the Humanist's social passion." (Humanist Manifesto I, Eighth)

"In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitative, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults... Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire..." (Humanist Manifesto II, Sixth)

But we reply.

In its own words, Humanism condemns itself and confesses its surrender of the future. Aware of the unlimited power of "sexual proclivity" and the unlimited inventiveness of "life-styles," Humanism seeks to set limits by exhortation: "we do not approve..." etc. Here, again, Humanism confesses itself against the future for its claim is self-realization "here and now." But the self-realization of each and all is not harmonized when eternity is surrendered, for the realization of my self may well be - as the secular story reveals - at the expense of other selves. The exhortation to virtue by which Humanism seeks to limit this war of each against all is set in a bed of quicksand. For who is it that exhorts and who is it that hears the exhortation. Only those very beings who by their conduct make the exhortation needful.

In short, Humanism is but another name, a disingenuous name for licentiousness and hedonism. And where Humanism appeals

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to virtue and against "exploitation" and "promiscuity," it fails to admit that the appeal is not its own but only borrowed from the voices of eternity and transcendence. Indeed, it cannot make the admission that it lacks the roots of virtue and seizes only the leaf and flower that another has planted. Without roots, however, the leaf falls and the flower withers.

V. Without faith there is no hope. (See Robert B. Tapp, "*God And Morality*")

What was cannot be changed and what is cannot be understood until completed. Hence it is, that toward the past, we can only stand as observers, recounting its moments as they happened, naming its errors, praising its truths. Toward the present we can only stand as witnesses, telling its events as they occur partially and blindly. With past and present, we simply were and are. Set in the frame of tomorrow, it is possible to move beyond tragedy and comedy and toward the good. But Humanism has destroyed the frame of tomorrow. The frame of tomorrow is felt as faith, the trusting belief that what is yet to come need not merely repeat what was and is. For Humanism, however, faith is error and trust an illusion. How else shall we understand secularity and causality-the idols of Humanism-which put happenings in place of events, numbers in place of passions, neutralities in place of dreams. This Humanism calls science and this destroys hope.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that Humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking."
(*Humanist Manifesto I*, Eleventh)

"Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific methods... must be extended further in the solution of human problems. But reason must be tempered by humility, since no group has a monopoly of wisdom or virtue... As science pushes back the boundary of the known, one's sense of wonder is continually renewed, and art, poetry, and music find their places along with religion and ethics." (Humanist Manifesto II, Fourth)

"The preciousness and dignity of the individual person is a central Humanist value. Individuals should be encouraged to realize their own creative talents and desires. We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility. Although science can account for the causes of behavior, the possibilities of individual freedom of choice exist in human life and should be increased." (Humanist Manifesto II, Fifth)

But we reply.

The weakness of Humanism reveals itself: "we assume..." it says. But if it is only that "we assume" then why shall there be this assumption rather than that? To this, Humanism cannot make reply except to "discourage sentimentality... and wishful thinking." But here, the weakness of Humanism reveals itself. For, what prevents us from assuming the rightness of "wishful thinking" and indeed in a war of each against all, wishful thinking may at least earn the merit of a relief from the pain of being. Humanism, knowing its weakness even while denying it, turns to the "preciousness and dignity" of the human being but fails to tell us why and how precious, why and how dignified and whence either. Surely, in this world of Humanism, we have known worthless human beings and undignified human conduct. And it is only in this world that we are and have our being if we are Humanists. Reason and experience left only to this world, then, deny Humanism's "central value." And so it is that without faith, there is no hope.

V1. Without spirit there is no humanity. (See Joseph Chuman, "*I Want To Get Out Of This World*")

Humanism makes great claims for reason and science, makes great denials of soul and spirit. Human beings then are like unto all other natural things. So it is that for Humanism, human being is an outcome of the statistical pictures drawn from and by natural laws, an outcome no different in kind than the motion of stone or planet, the swinging of apes in the trees, the crawling of vipers on the ground. The forces of the spirit-faith and hope-are reduced to mere charges and discharges of neuronic electricities. Even collectivities are but complexifications of these very same movements. Human beings come together and move apart much as magnets and planets do. For, "scientifically," it is precisely among-merely among-asps and apes and magnets and planets that human beings are to be found. But then, no special destiny attends human beings, no mission or dream characterizes their history which is only another, perhaps minor, chapter in natural history.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Humanism believes that man is part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process." (Humanist Manifesto I, Second)

"Holding an organic view of life, Humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected." (Humanist Manifesto I, Third)

"Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization and from rectifying social injustices. Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the "ghost in the machine" and the "separable soul." Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism

transacting in a social and cultural context... " (Humanist Manifesto II, Second)

But we reply.

Humanism looks upon the surface of things and concludes that the surface is all. Yes, the soul will leave the body and the spirit is not material. But this is not to claim that there are two realities but instead to see one reality more richly than through the lens of mere mechanism. Moreover, Humanism ignores its own claim of fact. For the art which it praises remains after the artist has moved on to other things or has died. Similarly, the idea of the scientist and the ideal of the dreamer live on. But how is this possible unless there is a realm of spirit which is a habitation for these permanent possessions of human beings. Else, truth and beauty and goodness die with memory and if, as Humanism admits, even race memory will disappear then truth and beauty and goodness are but momentary ghosts. So, the evanescence of all value is forecast in Humanism's evolutionism and materialism.

VII. Without God there is no Humanism. (See Ralph A. Alpher, "*Big Bang Cosmology*")

We admit that Humanism announces worthy goals. But we add that its goals are either flawed by the self-contradiction of Humanism or merely borrowed without attribution from those it claims to replace. Nothing reveals this more clearly than the atheism of Humanism, although it is our impression that Humanists themselves often retreat from the harshness of atheism and seek a nondescript agnosticism or "non-theism." Yet, as we have seen, the very things which Humanism proclaims are betrayed by the ways in which the Humanist proclamation is uttered. Consider that without God there is no eternity and without eternity no future; that without God there is no faith and without faith no hope; that without God there is no immortality and without immortality, no good. For what is God? It is the ground of all being, the

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warrant of time through timelessness, the promise and yes, the threat of judgement. Remove these and that which assures them and the Humanist claim of fulfillment and justice and peace and beauty is removed. And in its place are left mere items of existence some of which bleed and sleep a troubled sleep.

Of course, Humanists claim otherwise. Thus,

"Religious Humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created." (Humanist Manifesto I, First)

..But, we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves. " (Humanist Manifesto II, First)

But we reply:

At last, Humanism reveals itself in its delusion. For what can responsibility mean when it is self assigned, neither enforced by providence nor justified by purpose. And why shall responsibility be accepted when it is a burden which does not warrant its pain. And if we must save ourselves then, indeed, we are lost for even as we save ourselves, others are only about saving themselves and are not mindful of the rest of us. Nor, given the absence of eternity and immortality, the absence of God in short, can we understand why we should be mindful of the rest. Humanism thereby announces a grand ideal and then subverts it. In that Humanism is not merely in error-for which it might be forgiven-but in sin. For it promises that which it must betray and in that betrayal it not only denies itself but destroys those whom it convinces.

Humanism, to be Humanism, is needful of God...

{The fragment ends...}