

**The Philosophy
and
Practice
of
Radical Humanism**

M. N. Roy

FOREWORD

On 9th February 1949 M.N. Roy delivered a speech on the Philosophy and Practice of Radical Humanism in a college at Belgaum. I was present on the occasion and I still remember the profound impression which the speech left on the audience.

As usual Ellen Roy had taken shorthand notes of the speech. The notes, however, remained untranscribed during M.N. Roy's life-time. They were later transcribed by Ellen Roy and the speech was published in three issues of the weekly *Radical Humanist* in April 1956.

The speech, reprinted here, gives in a clear and concise form the historical background and contemporary relevance of the philosophy of Radical Humanism, and indicates how its practice differs from traditional power politics. Although the speech was delivered more than twenty years ago, the ideas expressed by the distinguished speaker have lost nothing of their freshness and practical value. On the contrary, their validity is borne out by the experience of the intervening period.

It is hoped that this booklet will be found particularly useful by new members of the Radical Humanist Association.

New Delhi,
September 24, 1970.

V. M. Tarkunde

THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF RADICAL HUMANISM

New Humanism is a school of philosophy. Philosophers are supposed to live in a world of thoughts isolated from the world of men and events, in a rarefied atmosphere of academic abstraction. This conception of philosophy has done a good deal of harm to the world. Because, while the thinkers were unconcerned with the world of events, those engaged in worldly activities did not attach sufficient importance to ideas and thoughts, to the philosophies which determine human action and hence the events that go into the making of history.

History is not a mere chronicle of events, not only the story of kings and battles and wars waged and won or lost ; nor is it only the history of the conflict of classes or the evolution of the forces of production. History is all that ; but in addition, history is also the dynamics of ideas. Unless the history of the evolution of ideas is studied together with that of the march of events, we shall not have a comprehensive view of history. And without such a view, without a thorough understanding of the past, we shall not be able to properly tackle the problems of the present, and we would be marching into the future groping in the dark.

Philosophy and Social Sciences

History, politics and economics are called the social sciences. These are the sciences which deal neither with inanimate matter nor with biology and the various manifes-

tations of life. But they do deal with men of flesh and blood. The social sciences study human behaviour and try to establish the norms guiding human behaviour. All these various branches of studies concerned with human beings, the national as well as the social aspects of the science of man, must be integrated into one logically coherent system of thought. That is the task of philosophy, if it is to claim the distinction given to it traditionally and if it is ever to exercise an effective influence on the movements and activities of men in this world.

When we study subjects like history, economics and politics, and particularly when we come to the problems of political practice, of economic and political institutions, we are likely to take what is called a practical, a pragmatic point of view. That is to say, people engaged in these fields of activity should not be burdened by philosophical convictions and principles, should not be hampered by theories ; but they should be practical men trying to solve problems according to the possibilities of a given situation. For, when they are handicapped by preconceived ideas of philosophical and theoretical nature, it is feared that they would not be able to be efficient politicians and practical economists or administrators.

In academic institutions, where we study with the object of acquiring knowledge, it is necessary that studies should be conducted in specialisation. Not only the studies in ordinary colleges but even the highest scientific investigations have to be conducted in isolation. In order to understand one particular phenomenon, the scientist must isolate that phenomenon, take it out of the context of the entire setting of physical nature and study it in conditions which eliminate external influences. In the social sciences, that would be obviously an unrealistic approach. Because, no social phenomenon can be understood except in its actual

context. We have to keep this distinction in mind. But to take that view indiscriminately for all research would mean that either we would have to study and understand the totality of the Universe as a whole or we could not study and understand anything of it at all.

Appearance and Reality

There was a time when that was the starting point of philosophical thought and metaphysical explorations : That it is not possible to understand the phenomenal world because phenomena are appearances and appearances are misleading. One may acquire any amount of knowledge about appearances, but that knowledge is useless, because we can understand appearances only when we have grasped the reality beyond those appearances. Therefore, it was implied, let us not waste time in trying to understand the various aspects of life and nature, but endeavour to penetrate to the essence of things.

But what is "the essence of things" ? That question was answered by a simplification : in every component part of the Universe there is a reflexion, or an echo of the essence. Therefore, a man who wants to understand the essence of the Universe, who wishes to discover the reality behind the appearances, must try to know himself first. By knowing himself he will find opened before him all the roads to the secrets of nature. That was the approach of the old sages who wrote "Know thyself". That was the guiding principle also of the sages of our country and even today the general belief is that the realisation of the self and understanding of the inner mechanism of man's existence is the only road to the understanding of the Universal Soul. *Jivatma* is only part of *Parmatma*, which cannot be grasped by any human mind but is mysteriously situated somewhere where man's mind cannot penetrate. Therefore, we must

abstract our attention from the various aspects of our biological existence, and then only the flash and the spark will be seen in the light of which the free soul will realise its identity with the Universal Soul.

This kind of approach to the discovery of truth and the quest of knowledge naturally guided all the best men and the finest brains and noblest souls away from the affairs of this world. They applied themselves to this contemplative and introspective thought with the hope of finding in themselves the possibility of realising ultimate reality, of finding in themselves the road to an understanding of the infinite. It is quite clear that, if the human mind is part of the physical human existence, which is finite and therefore incapable of grasping the infinite, it follows that the acquisition of perfect knowledge and grasp of truth, is beyond the purview of human mind. Truth is not to be understood. It is to be experienced. But experienced by whom ? Not by me. Because "I" am only physical existence. To grasp truth I must be something more than that ; something super-natural has to be added, something mysterious and not of this world.

It is quite easy to see that this line of thinking tends to isolate people from the world in which they live. They regard this world as a passing phenomenon and the problems of daily life as petty matters which should not be allowed to distract our attention. But this kind of thinking dominated the philosophers of all ages. Philosophy was concerned with things higher than the lives of human beings ; and if that was true for all philosophy then the life that the ordinary men and women are bound to live in this world could never be guided by appreciation of knowledge and truth. If that conception of philosophy were true, then the life of men on this earth would have to be guided by the laws of the jungle, and the history of

events throughout the ages would appear to be proof of that.

Finally, as if further proof were wanted, the world was plunged into two world wars during one generation, and before the gun fire of the last one has died out, the world is already threatened again with a third world war. When we have come to such a position, where human ingenuity, human intelligence and sheer commonsense seem unable to prevent mankind rushing from one catastrophe into another, heading straight towards its own destruction, then we must come to the conclusion that human affairs until now have not, indeed, been guided by rational thinking, not to mention moral values or love of truth or reason, but by the laws of the jungle.

Our Self-righteousness

When we examine the condition of the modern world, we in India are inclined to take up a superior and even sanctimonious attitude, saying that the West is doomed because it has been pursuing materialist purposes and objectives. The materialism of the West is said to have found its Nemesis ; but in our country we shall build up an entirely different world where the laws of love, truth and morality will harmoniously guide human behaviour. It is very pleasing to have this hope and I wish most sincerely that it were more than an illusion. But if we look to things at home realistically, if we are not carried away by the questionable virtue of self-righteousness, can we really entertain that hope and illusion ? Are the affairs of our country really guided by love, brotherliness, harmony and truth ? Are we not also being guided by the laws of the jungle ? To admit this will be no more than to admit that we are also human beings, that India also is populated by ordinary mortals and has inherited the same traditions of

human thought which have driven other parts of the world so near perdition.

Therefore, if India is making the same experiences, it is due to those traditions which separate the sacred spiritual life from the actual life of men on this earth. Virtue, truth, love and harmony belong to the spiritual aspect of our existence. And since there is a hiatus between our spiritual and our physical existence, the virtues of the former cannot be applied to the latter. To observe them, one has to renounce the world. Therefore, the possibility of being ruled by laws other than those of the jungle seems quite remote. Because, in India this differentiation between the spiritual and the material life was much deeper than anywhere else in the world. That again is not due to any inherent difference between East and West, but is the result of uneven development in human progress. There has been no essential distinction between East and West except chronologically. We live here in a social, cultural and intellectual atmosphere which approximately compares with that of the 16th and 17th century in Europe. So, the difference is not between East and West as such, but between the 16th and the 20th century.

Separation Between Spiritual and Physical Life

It is quite plausible to raise the doubt that, since the development of European thought landed Europe in such a state in the 20th century as we are rightly criticising to-day, should we not pursue a different path? To find the answer, let us first analyse what that path was and which thoughts guided those developments, and then try to find out if we have not the same fallacious ideas and traditions in our system of thought. If you agree with me that the main defect is the differentiation and separation between the spiritual and physical life of man, then you will find that

this fault exists in an aggravated form in our own system of thought. And if we can recognise this defect, we shall also be able to remove it. When I talk about philosophy from public platforms, it is with this object in view, and with the firm confidence that it can be done with the collective efforts of students and scholars and thinking men like yourselves.

Origin of Religion

So long as the backward state of scientific knowledge made it impossible for men to understand the physical phenomena of inanimate as well as animate nature, it was logically inevitable that some metaphysical, super-natural assumptions had to be made to explain those phenomena and satisfy man's innate craving to know and understand. Even to-day, in our scientific research, we adopt the same method of hypothetical assumptions. A hypothesis may be later invalidated by positive knowledge acquired in course of further studies based on that hypothesis. The plausibility of a hypothesis is proportional to the positive contents of our previous knowledge. Consequently, the hypotheses of modern scientific research do not appear to be so arbitrary and fantastic as some of the hypotheses made by more primitive men. But the principle is the same. Religion was the result of hypotheses of primitive men wishing to explain the phenomena of nature which he experienced every day and on which his existence depended.

Primitive man was continually threatened by various physical phenomena ; unless he could have some understanding of their working and how they happened, he was a helpless victim of those frightening forces. In those days the store of human knowledge was very limited. Consequently, nothing like a scientific hypothesis was possible. Hypotheses were of an *ad hoc* and imaginative

nature. From experience man knows that he himself does certain things with certain results. For instance, man strikes two flints together and produces fire. The spark and the fire it lights are the product of man's activity. Thus, when man sees lightning in the sky, he reasons that it must have been produced by a big man, a being like himself, only much much bigger. This anthropomorphic conception of nature made early humanity populate the whole of nature with gods which were like men but infinitely bigger than man himself. To approximate in power these bigger men was man's highest ideal, and to attain that ideal, he worshipped them. That is the origin of religion.

Freedom, Knowledge and Power

I had to refer to this part of history in order to explain the apparent difference between East and West. Originally, perhaps until the 14th or 15th century, the human mind developed very much on similar lines, more or less in the same direction, everywhere in the world. You will find that when you read the ancient literature of Greece and of India and also of other parts of the world where similar ideas were developed. These were the expressions of man's struggle for freedom and quest for knowledge. Man was not born free. Man was born *to be* free. To be free is the essence of human life. Man was born not free but a slave to his circumstances in which all the forces of nature were weighing him down and trying to crush him. Nature is cruel inasmuch as it leaves man entirely to his own resources ; but it has also equipped him with the potentiality of the resources which can make him free. Man had to struggle against nature if he wanted to live. Struggle for existence is the original physical content of the struggle for freedom. But man could not control or understand the natural phenomena unless he had some knowledge of the

working of those phenomena. To-day we wonder how tortuous were those early efforts of man to know and to explain. If you put a master chess player against a very bad and inexperienced player, the master may be often defeated. Because the master knows only to play like a master ; he does not know the mind of a novice, and therefore he cannot follow the working of that mind and loses. The primitive hypotheses of early men show us the working of their inexperienced minds.

Quest for knowledge of nature, in which man lives as an integral part, was essential for man's very existence. In other words, to be free from the constant threat of the frightening natural phenomena, that is, to carry on his struggle for existence successfully, man must have knowledge of those phenomena as his instrument for controlling them. Knowledge gave him the power to understand and control nature. Therefore we can perceive this hierarchy : Freedom, requiring knowledge ; knowledge, giving the power to be free.

But the notions of freedom on the one side and power on the other came to be subsequently looked down upon as worldly matters. On the other hand, knowledge, which is to be, so to say, the connecting link between the two, came to be isolated from its association with worldly life and was made the special preserve of the "spiritual" philosophers. It is because of this divorce that power which was to be a means to freedom, could eventually become a means for the suppression of freedom.

Thus, in course of time, divorced from life and experience, philosophy came to be a body of beliefs and dogmas which were rationalised by learned people. Based on these beliefs and dogmas, a type of society came into being which was inimical to man's quest for truth and

knowledge, which alone can make him free. But that quest could not be crushed. Ever again, man began to question the reasonableness of those beliefs and with it the foundations of the society which was based on them and in which he could not be free.

The Age of Questioning

The age of questioning came in our history with the Upanishadic period following upon the Vedic times. The Upanishadic period was one of the brightest epochs of our history, and it was so because it was an age of questioning. The Vedas assumed a lot of things. There were gods which were responsible for every natural phenomenon. Therefore, worship of those gods and their ritualistic propitiation with sacrifices to make them see that the natural phenomena did actually happen as desired, was characteristic of that period. But in course of time, as human understanding and intelligence grew and the human mind began to question all the many hypotheses of the Vedas, the Upanishadic literature became the record of these questions. From this enquiry resulted the six systems of Indian philosophy.

Spiritual Culture

The same process or similar processes went on in other parts of the world. Just as India lived in a period of "spiritual culture", a period dominated by the religious mode of thought, so Europe also had lived for over a thousand years in a period of similar "spiritual culture". From the third to the fifteenth century, European culture was intensely spiritual, sanctimonious and religious as our own much vaunted spiritual genius. But towards the end of the holy Middle-Ages, as this period between antiquity and modern times is called, man began to peep into the secrets of nature and reclaimed for this purpose

the heritage of ancient civilisation, that is, the positive scientific thought which had been evolved in ancient Greece, side by side with metaphysical speculations.

I have no doubt that, if we search our own ancient thought, we shall make a similar discovery. But because we in India attach more importance to the spiritual and contemplative type of thought, all valuable primitive scientific ideas which were evolved in the earlier periods of our history were forgotten. And transcendental philosophy, the religious mode of thought, came to be regarded as our special heritage, while in Europe, fortunately for various reasons which it is not possible for me to enumerate here, from the 14th century onwards, there was a revival of scientific thought, experimentation and investigation.

Birth of Humanism

That revival of scientific interest coincided with a growing dissatisfaction of the best men of the time with the "spiritual culture" of their age. Their minds were no longer orientated towards something beyond this world as their highest ideal. The minds of the great men of that time were turned towards the state of this world of men. We know that many of the pioneers of modern science were priests, people who lived in monasteries and who were intensely religious men. In the age of spiritual culture, knowledge and culture were the preserve of the priests. But while developing scientific knowledge which takes nothing for granted and knows only the one test of reason, they undermined their own mode of thought, the religious mode of thought, which starts from faith in something final and given.

Thus, the new scientific thought blasted the very foundation of religion, even while it was being developed

by intensely religious men. This shows the dynamics of ideas. It proves that every human being is potentially capable of developing thoughts according to their own logic, if only he applies his reason and intelligent mind. We should not forget that religion was also the expression of a primitive rationalism, of man's desire to explain his surroundings, his quest for knowledge and his search for truth. Man wanted to understand nature and to understand nature according to his lights, he made certain assumptions and hypotheses which eventually became fossilised into religious dogmas. And religious beliefs and institutions acquired such a firm grip on the human mind that for centuries it could not function freely.

In Europe, that grip was not quite so firm as in India. There they developed the tendency to doubt and criticise much earlier. They discarded old hypotheses rather than rationalising them indefinitely when they had become too incredible, and evolved fresh hypotheses. And, in the process, modern science was born. The faith in a world beyond this Universe of ours disappeared progressively and the height of human thought was no longer conceived as a system of sublime contemplation and meditation. Philosophy had to satisfy the keen intelligence of those inventors, discoverers and thinkers who laid the foundation for the exact sciences.

The philosophy which resulted from the resurgence of science in Europe about the fifteenth century was called Humanism because it was a philosophy of man and concerned with human life on this earth. Until then, philosophy was not humanist ; it was "spiritualist", that is, super-humanist. It was concerned not with man but with things beyond the reach of man. About the 15th century, the leaders of thought, the great artists, great philosophers, great lawyers, many of whom were religious people, monks

and priests, began to see the truth, the perennial truth of history, that society is the creation of man, that man created society in pursuance of his struggle for existence, which is his struggle for freedom and that everything that man created, either ideally or materially, was common human tradition and heritage and must have a bearing on the behaviour of man and the solution of human problems.

Philosophy and Science Inseparable

Human problems cannot be solved by running away from them into the contemplation of things higher than those problems, dismissing them as petty and of no consequence. It will not do to say that this world is full of misery and man, being incorrigible, had only one way out, namely, to give up this world, forget the world and live his own sublime life of contemplation in isolation. No, we shall have to take men as they are but make them apply the knowledge developed since the dawn of civilisation to their own human problems. Anchorites cannot solve the problems of mankind.

Since then, science and philosophy have been inseparably connected. Divorced from science, philosophy is religious belief. Philosophy, to deserve its name, is the integration of all the knowledge acquired through investigations of the various branches of nature into a coherent world view. The reunion of these two branches of human activity—the speculative integrating, and the creative-social—laid the foundation of modern culture and civilisation, and this entire system of thought became known as Humanism. This system of thought attaches supreme importance to the human being on this earth and regards all problems from the point of view of man's freedom and spiritual advance. Man's spiritual advance means his advance towards greater freedom, so that he will no longer

feel himself squeezed and suffocated by his environments. There was a time when man had not sufficient knowledge and hence no power over his environments and when his only possible freedom was of running away from life. Because, why fight an enemy so incomparably stronger than ourselves and go down fighting ? Rather let us go where we shall not be pestered and confronted by this enemy and enjoy freedom in imagination and peace outside the world of human society.

Real Spiritual Freedom

Under certain circumstances that might be a kind of freedom but you cannot forever run away from the world ; and everybody cannot run away from the world anyway, and in our days we can no longer run away from the world at all. Therefore, the type of freedom attainable by running away from the world is not for us. People may be dying outside our maths and ashrams and it would be difficult for us to call it all illusion. That does not work any more to-day. To-day we have to fight for our freedom. In that fight we shall find our spiritual liberation. In proportion as I feel that I develop the power to resist the temptation of following that way of least resistance and to overcome those enemies which are trying to thwart and overwhelm man in his fight for freedom, to that extent I have unfolded my human potentialities and to that extent I am spiritually free.

The philosophy of Humanism maintains that man is capable of attaining freedom not only in imagination but in actuality. Because this philosophy attaches supreme importance to man and places man in the centre of everything, it was called Humanism. Humanism contributed more to the development of modern thought and culture than any other system of thought. Therefore, you will find to-day in

Europe when the modern world appears to be moving towards a position like that of the Roman Empire breaking down, when gloomy prophets are prophesying the end of human civilisation, when everything appears to be desperate and sordid, the minds of men who can look beyond their noses and who are not obsessed with their immediate self-centred concerns only, the minds of such men are surveying the allround human misery and trying to understand what is the reason of the degeneration and decay.

Contemporary Crisis and Humanist Revival

In the search for the causes of this crisis, it is now being realised that western, *i.e.*, modern civilisation stepped on the declining plane of decay the moment it broke away from the tradition of Humanism. The day when man-made institutions were placed above men, the day when imaginary collective egos were celebrated as something bigger than individual egos, when a nation was conceived to be something bigger than the sum total of the human beings composing that nation, when society was conceived to be something more than an abstraction, more than the individuals constituting society—on that day, as the result of this perversion and wrong notion of human history, there developed various systems of political thought which not only went against the tradition of Humanism but actually negatived the tradition of Humanism.

Modern civilisation is threatened with destruction not because of anything inherently wrong with it, but because of its betrayal of its own source of inspiration. Having learned this lesson thoughtful men of our time, in many countries of Europe and elsewhere, have been feeling the need of what has now come to be recognised as a humanist revival. Worshipping at the shrines of a variety of collective egos,—nations, states, empires, society with a

capital "S" and classes—the world has come to this impasse, because man himself has been forgotten. Man has disappeared from the scene of social thought and social engineering. Some say that national interests must come before everything else, some say the forces of production are the all-powerful godhead. But neither nations, states, nor forces of production have any use for man as an individual. When man is degraded and relegated to such a position, naturally he loses confidence in himself.

Everybody talks about the crisis of our time. What is this crisis of our time? The core of the crisis is precisely that man has lost faith in himself. Now, is this not a tragedy? Whatever exists in this world of men—good or bad, it is the creation of man. And here comes man, the creator, and says: I am helpless in the face of this creation of mine. I am helpless, I am hopeless, I am doomed. That is just as if the religious would say God is helpless in the face of the wrongs of the world. Because whoever may be responsible for the physical universe, man is certainly the creator of the social world in which he lives. Whatever was created since the day when man's ancestors came down from the trees and, instead of growing longer limbs in the struggle for existence, conceived the idea of breaking a branch to prolong the arm with which to pluck the fruits from the higher branches for his nourishment—that was man's own creation. And today, man the creator is losing faith in himself. That is the greatest tragedy of all, greater than any ever written since the dawn of literature.

New Humanism

Therefore, the solution of the crisis of our time lies in the revival of man's faith in himself, that is to say, a humanist revival. The main cause of Humanism relapsing

into the background, after having provided the initial impetus for the tremendous upsurge and development of the last four or five hundred years, was the fact that man's knowledge of himself lagged far behind his knowledge of the rest of the physical world. Consequently, even when man was the point of departure, when man was given the place of supremacy in the scheme of things, man himself remained unexplained. Hence in course of time, man himself became a sort of mystic entity, something assumed as given, another elementary undefinable which could not be understood. That is to say, instead of one God in heaven, we created millions of gods walking on the earth ; because, there was believed to be something in man which cannot be understood ; and not to be understood and understandable is the privilege of gods. But that conception of man was not consistent with the scientific spirit and for this reason Humanism was relegated to something concerned only with literature and the arts.

But since then man's knowledge has grown immensely, including his knowledge of himself. The only remaining missing link is that between man and the inorganic background of physical nature out of which life arose. But there is no mystery about this missing link. The utmost we can say is that on that point we do not yet know enough. But since we do know already so much more even about that than we did only fifty years ago, nobody would dare to say that we could never know that too. There are what are called the psychic aspects of human life. But here too, we cannot assume that these are any more mysterious than the other aspects of human life. We may not yet know all about them but we cannot give them up as unknowable. Whatever exists is accessible to knowledge. Truth refers to what exists. Therefore truth is accessible to knowledge. Truth can be

known. It is the content of knowledge. What is not accessible to knowledge is delirium and dream. Therefore, our knowledge about the essence of man may not be perfect today but it is much more ample and complete than it was in the days of the earlier Humanism and there is no reason to fear that this inadequacy of our knowledge cannot also be eliminated in course of time.

We know that man, rising out of the background of the physical universe, is the highest form of evolution in nature. If there is any creative power in man, it can operate through man alone, as a function of his physical existence. If there is anything positive in the old notion of the relation between *Parmatma* and *Jivatma*, it is in the sense that if *Parmatma* exists it operates only through *Jivatma*. It is held that man is bad, immoral, unthinking, and that to improve the affairs of the world is hopeless, because man will always be so as it is his nature to be so. But our knowledge of man's whole history tells us that man is essentially and potentially rational. Every human behaviour, in the last analysis, is rationally motivated, however irrational it may appear.

We further say that morality, being the intelligent endeavour to respond to our surroundings, results from our rationality. Morality springs from man's rationality. Since man is essentially rational, therefore he is also potentially moral. If that is the essence of man we only need to remind man of his essence in order to make his potentialities actual, and he will regain his faith in himself. In this way we can undo the harm done to man. Having remedied the mistakes of the past and solved the crisis created by those mistakes, man can then march on to much greater achievements than in the past.

Humanism is not only a term associated with a certain period of the history of Europe. It has been the essence of all human thinking everywhere and in all ages. Therefore, every human thought is essentially humanist thought; human thinking has always striven to move on humanist lines. It has only been thwarted in the past because of man's inadequate scientific knowledge. Therefore, Humanism is the virtue and heritage of all Humanity. Humanism is as old as thinking mankind itself. Consequently, and logically, we do not say that we must create a humanist philosophy but merely that we must promote a humanist revival, a Renaissance. Rather we say that there was a time when Humanism suffered a setback due to certain deficiencies in human knowledge. To have a humanist revival we must take up the humanist tradition and enrich it with man's new knowledge of himself acquired in the meantime.

Therefore we call this philosophy New Humanism. Strictly speaking, there is not much new in it. But humanism is being spread to-day by a variety of people who understand Humanism as revivalism, that is the restoration of that type of Humanism which prevailed in the earlier days when Humanism had a distinctly metaphysical and mystic content and therefore came to grief. That kind of Humanism having failed to solve the problems of man in its time, will naturally be less capable of solving the more complicated problems of man in our time. Hence we must differentiate humanist revivalism from a revival of the humanist tradition, to be enriched by the scientific knowledge acquired in the intervening centuries. Our kind of Humanism is forward-looking and wants to create something new. We must differentiate it clearly from the revivalist type of Humanism which leaves "man" vague and mystified. In order to make that distinction explicit,

we are calling our philosophy New or Scientific or Radical Humanism.

Humanist Ethics

Many thinkers differ with us on one point and that is ethics. Many people cannot conceive of a secular or rational morality. There are many thinkers in Europe to-day who are talking about a revival of Christianity without Christ, a religious revival without God. They say that the crisis of the modern world is due to a complete loss of moral sense. Particularly in politics and generally in public life, morality has come to be considered as irrelevant. In this important sector of human existence, the laws of the jungle rule supreme. Therefore, all thinking men are concerned with reintroducing morality into public life in politics and economic relations. Since they cannot conceive of the possibility of a rational secular morality, their sanction of morality has to be transcendental. They may say that they do not believe in revelation or religion in the traditional sense ; but in fact they ask for a revival of religion. Their position amounts to saying that man can be man only if he believes that there is something bigger than man, something above man, from which he derives the sanction to be moral and good.

The problems of ethics have become the burning problems of contemporary philosophy. There was a time when ethical problems were considered as individual problems. To-day we find the necessity of a social ethics. If we entirely rely on human instinct we can never be quite sure how two men will act in a similar situation, because we never know how intuition or instincts operate. So, there can be no norm. If you refer morality to intuition, it would forever remain a vague dream. In order to make morality a reliable factor in the remaking of our world,

morality must have a sanction which can stand the test of reason. Our knowledge of human affairs, our knowledge of biology, physiology and psychology and whatever insight we have into psychic phenomena, enable us to state that man is essentially rational. Only if morality is referred to man's rationality, can we be really, voluntarily and consciously moral, and goodness as well as badness lose their mystic connotation. Only when goodness can be rationally conceived can there be a common norm of goodness.

The burning problem of ethics, and particularly of social morality, is the search for a common norm. The need is greater than ever before. Only if that norm can be found in man himself, can it be a stable and common measure. To-day we can state that biologically all men are similarly constructed and hence all men are likely to react more or less in similar way in similar circumstances, provided they have a minimum common background of knowledge as the basis for their ability to discriminate, judge and decide. All men being similarly constructed they can be expected to react similarly in similar situations. Therefore, only a rationally conceived ethics, based on man's biological properties, will enable us to set up a common norm of morality and to introduce moral values in public behaviour.

New Humanism claims to meet this greatest need of our time because it shows that a secular rational morality is possible. Once that is done, the necessity of human beings subordinating themselves to some super-human authority even for their moral behaviour disappears. Only then man will begin to feel his own authority, dignity and sovereignty. And only then will he voluntarily by his own reasoning as part of his social world, co-operate with others. Social relations will then become harmonious, because a rational morality will understand the motives of all and concede to all the rights which are claimed for

every free, rational and moral individual. Then morality will be possible in public life and politics will cease to be a scramble for power in which the end justifies all means.

Practice of New Humanism

In an academic gathering like the present, I might leave it at this, trusting to the logic of my exposition and your intelligent understanding. But there may be those who say : This is all very good, but how can these ideas be practised ? My answer to them would be that this question is raised precisely because you have lost faith in man yourselves. When you say that the ideas are good, it means that you understand these ideas and appreciate them. Then, why do you not go and practise them in the conviction that what is right must also be possible ? That is the only way to prove that good ideas can be practised. Example is better than precept. There have been moralists from time immemorial. No use writing a few more volumes on ethics. In order to introduce morality in public life, some people must bell the cat. In the midst of the bedlam of contemporary politics, with its opposing appeals to contradictory emotions, nothing will help but a growing group of people who will behave rationally and morally.

The point of departure of New Humanism is eminently practical and when you ask how is it to be practised I feel you have not understood the ideas of which I have spoken. The trouble with us is that there is no relation between our thinking, our convictions and our action. Our action is mostly on the level of emotion, if not of immediate gain. We hear that the world is bad ; there must be a revolution ; society must be reconstructed ; and how is all this to be done ? You form a political party with a good programme and ask people to follow you and to vote for you and when you come to power you will make a revolution. But can you ?

Whatever you do, a good party cannot be formed except by good men, just as a good society can be created only by good men. No use wanting first great men to form a good society, so that good men can be created by it. It is not great men, but good men who can make of this world a better world. Indeed, the world has been brought to the present plight precisely by the "great men". Let us have good men. A New Humanist is a man who wants to be a good man. And if a few good men can operate in the world messed up as it is by the great men, I shall say that there is hope.

Scramble for Power

There is that miraculous shortcut of the capture of power. Supposed to be a shortcut, it is in reality a blind-alley. There are five parties each saying that its programme will create the best society. The people as a whole are not capable of judging. For example, take inflation. Every party has a solution for the much dreaded inflation. But how many people know what is inflation? Incidentally, while all talk about it, are you sure we are having an inflation at all in this country? The main feature of inflation is absent here, indeed we have the reverse of it: we have lagging production and rising prices. However that may be, the people will not know either way. And whoever can appeal to their most primitive emotions, he will win the contest; and he who appeals to blind religious faith of the masses will most certainly win the scramble; and like this while saying that they are fighting for freedom, they will surely destroy the very root of man's reason and hence his only guarantee to be free.

It is said that one must have power in order to reconstruct society. Under the existing constitution any party will be only five years in power. That is not enough to do what any party wants to do. So, from election to

election, it will postpone the good things it wanted to do, simply for remaining in power and from election to election it must tell greater and greater lies to explain why the promises have not been fulfilled. Because, if the real reasons were given the people might not return that party again to power. Thus, the more serious a party is about its programme, the more it will be compelled to use any means for the end of remaining in power in the ultimate but ever-receding hope, or illusion, to do what it wanted to do. But with all the power in the world it could not be done, because with the concern for the nation, for society, for the class or the party, nobody cared to remake the man who ultimately has to remake society.

The Humanist Way

Everybody says that power corrupts. But it is believed that power corrupts only the others—the corruptibles. The incorruptibles, however, have never a chance to come to power. Therefore, democracy has everywhere degenerated into demagoguery. The way of capturing power and then imposing structural changes from above having proved futile in experience, catastrophe is staring us in the face unless another way can be found. We have suggested a way. This way may appear to be very long, although I have proved before that it is not really so long at all. But even if it were so long, if there is no other way, then it is yet the shortest way; because the only way is also the shortest way. Either we have to join the scramble for power and live in the madhouse of power-politics or we start on the pioneering work, the result of which may be seen only by another generation. But if we feel that to participate in what has been going on is not worthwhile, we must naturally go the new way.

By debasing man, by merging men into masses, we have created a monster to whose emotions we must always appeal because it has no other distinction. But people will remain masses only if they remain backward. And since political parties need the masses to appeal to, they must let them remain backward. The alternative is to educate the people so that they will not be submerged into masses any more, because then the possibility of swaying them by emotional appeals to vote blindly for those that make the most reckless and demagogic promises will be gone. That is our political object. That is our programme of action. The result will become visible in the behaviour and action of men and women constituting the masses, in their refusal to act and react as masses, by their appearance on the scene of their local world as discriminating, intelligent persons deciding what is good for them and what is to be done to bring it about.

Once the beginning is made, such a movement is bound to grow. I see no other way. While speaking about the practice of New Humanism, I should make it clear that we can participate in all existing social and political activities, only keeping out of the scramble for power. That does not prevent us to be with the people in all their affairs and activities, continually explaining things to them, helping them to think for themselves, carrying on activities in which they can participate and which will educate them and raise their intellectual and cultural level, much more than occasional lectures or even regular classes can do. Because, in the existing schools, people are only taught to conform to the established order of things. The education which will lay down the foundation of a true democracy, which will remind man of his creativity, must be different from the education imparted in the established institutions ; it will be informal, unconventional and non-conformist. It will be imparted by persons living with the people

participating in their lives and activities in an intelligent and exemplary manner. The people will have respect for such persons and learn from them, particularly when the people will see that, for doing all this, those persons are not asking for power nor for votes, nor for gain, nor to become ministers. Indeed, I am sure that this is the only way in which people will regain confidence in human nature, and thereby confidence in themselves. And that is the most effective way to bring about those changes which will remake the world into a better and freer world.

I think this is possible. If you agree, act accordingly. If you have a better idea, we are open to be convinced in a free exchange of opinion. We must create an atmosphere of enquiry and undogmatic free thinking. That atmosphere we can create here and now, and that is the necessary precondition for free institutions and a better society. Without capture of power, New Humanism offers an alternative programme for solving the problems of human existence. Indeed, the philosophy I am propounding is itself a social programme. But even if you agree, I shall not ask you to join my party because I have no party. Even if you are already members of another party I shall not ask you to give up your loyalties in order to act according to these ideas. They can be practised everywhere, even in political parties, although at some stage loyalties may come to a clash. But it is fallacy that group loyalty is the highest loyalty. Let us be loyal to our own conscience and to our own freedom ; and since we have found a common denominator for our conscience and for our freedom with all other men, these loyalties can never really clash. But no ideas can be proved except in action and by experience, and experience in action will enable us continually to develop and perfect our ideas as a comprehensive and effective philosophy of freedom.

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The Journal was founded by the revolutionary philosopher, M. N. Roy, in the year 1937, soon after his release from a long term of imprisonment. Published initially as a weekly under the name *Independent India*, its first issue appeared in Bombay on 4th April, 1937. It has since been published regularly for more than three decades. After India attained independence, the name of the Journal was altered to *Radical Humanist*. It is now being published as monthly in Delhi.

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