

This narrative is a meditation on our shared humanity. By necessity, it is a monologue, a statement in a single voice—one informed by others certainly, but a single voice nevertheless—advocating a particular point of view. All the same, what is written here humbly is offered as an invitation to enter into a dialogue. Its readers are encouraged to reflect on the point of view offered here and then to seek out the opportunity to enter into dialogue with one another that, beyond putting forward any one individual’s point of view, can “offer common ground between persons and encourage social diversity.” (Arnett and Arneson 1999, 53)

My narrative also is a statement of humanism. According to Arnett and Arneson (1999, 53), humanism, as it was broadly conceived, “opened closed narrative structures, or what we call ideological structures, to interpretation . . . [where] themes of freedom, naturalism, and the civil function and earthly commitment of religion and the emergence of science all contributed to a public humanistic narrative in which the individual made the difference. From the time of the sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance, the human mind was bursting forth, but not without some way to describe the emergence of a broader based story on how the human could pursue the “good life” within a dialectical tension of self and institutions.”

The humanism advocated here “puts human nature at the center of the knowledge process and defines values in terms of the relation of things to human living.” (Reese 1927, vi). It “takes the limits of human nature and the ideals of dignity of the person seriously, attempting to understand what it means to be a human in a given historical moment in time.” (Arnett and Arneson 1999, 53) Explicit throughout is Todorov’s autonomy of the I, the finality of the you, and the universality of the they. (Todorov 2002, 159) Each of us is an autonomous individual, each a unique and irreplaceable end in himself or herself, just as all of us together also are social beings, all of us sharing the same basic human condition.

Further, the humanism advocated here, in the words of John Patrick Diggins (2009, 1), is radically conservative. It is radically conservative in the sense that its truths and insights can be found in the naturalistic writings of some of humanity’s greatest minds throughout history, from ancient philosophers through modern-day scientists. If we are to find these truths and insights at all compelling, convincing or persuasive, it is because they are derived from an understanding of human motives, purposes, and choices—in other words, our very human nature. What is offered here is meant to affirm a human life lived fully and well. What follows begins with (i) a description of the human self in terms of a naturalistic explanation of human nature, as suggested by the preceding characterizations of humanism. My narrative continues, moving from potential to informed practice, by examining, in turn, (ii) self-awareness, intentionality, and cooperativeness; (iii) living in community; (iv) beyond fear, beyond selfishness; (v) freedom and equality; and (vi) certainty and uncertainty. It concludes by suggesting (vii) how we all may enter into meaningful dialogue from the common conceptual ground that is our shared humanity.