

## What is Canadian Humanism?

The basic tenets of humanism, if one wants the elevator pitch, come in compassion, reason, and science. The more in-depth definitions change from generation to generation while represented within the declarations, manifestos, and statements. Some of the declarations, manifestos, and statements exist for organizations while others as a collective representative of a national stance. Humanism, by this multiple standard, becomes non-singular. The questions return home in the queries about the Canadian flavor of humanism, not by necessity an easy question and, in fact, one needing some exploration.

This consideration of humanism as plural implies questions about Canadiana and Canadianisms. Canadianisms are those markers of cultural identity reflected in behaviour – often verbal output - and, mostly, tacit or implicit knowledge with few exceptions, like, “Eh,” or an “ou” sounding as if “oo,” e.g., “Oot” instead of “Out.”

Others with some reflection may include kerfuffle, mickey, keener, Canuck, arse, hoser, and, of course, poutine. But this layering of humanism onto cultures can reflect rarer Canadian sensibilities - Molson muscle (potbelly), back bacon (Canadian bacon), rye and ginger (Canadian whiskey and ginger ale), serviette (paper napkin), and Mountie (member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or RCMP).

Canadiana is often represented with the peculiar character of aloneness, being apart, in search of oneself without others, and simply living in the eternal Great Outdoors. An example of this may come in the *Idea of North* by the prominent Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, best known for playing Bach – and well, of whom Canadians and other nationals find intrigue decades after Gould’s death.

Another may emerge in the equal status of women, the rights of women, or the unique character of women’s stories in a nation about one century into its granting of universal suffrage, where before, the country simply existed only with a particular suffrage for some men. Bearing in mind, of course, Indigenous Canadians, men and women, only acquired the right to vote in 1960, right in the backdoor of the national consciousness and, not surprisingly – probably because of embarrassment, talked about in public as much as one sees the wind.

The Canadiana in literature retains its women’s rights orientation prominently in the Anglo-Canadian realm with Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Atwood remarked on the foundations of the Western written word living in the collection of books or the library of ancient texts comprising the *Bible*, the poetic, literary, and dramatic works of Shakespeare, and European folk tales or myths. But Canadiana also comes in the narratives of the Indigenous, of the prominent Cree author Lee Maracle, who set a national genre on its races.

Some argue Canadian culture is a Christian one. That we are even a Christian nation. By the demographics, Canadians by a large majority self-identify as Christian, especially Roman Catholic Christian. In part, especially with the *Bible*, this harbours a modicum of truth to it. Although, even on the factor of demographics, Canadian Christians, in some denominations, continue to decline with a stunning rapidity due to death rates – so-called aging out. Unfortunately, the national character statement often comes heaped with an ought, as in, more Canadians ought to kowtow to this sensibility. Or this emerges in a political context, where the values ought to reflect some of the national origin there. However, one may note this only comes in Christian signifiers as needing acknowledgement rather than the litany of crimes done by self-identified Christians, and in the name of Christianity, through the origin story of the country.

Nonetheless, there are the novelties of accents on word and on the titles for things. There is the emphasis on the virtue of solitude. Continually, we see more respect for women's experiences, narratives and unique take on life, in addition to an incorporation of an Indigenous view – of the original inhabitants and caretakers of the geography and ecosystem. There is the acknowledgement of Christianity, in part, embedded into the cultural fabric representative of manifestations of Canadiana and Canadianisms, too. However, humanism remains both historical and living, nationally and internationally. It lives in the records and in the public consciousness in other words.

The historical context comes from Renaissance Humanism, or perhaps more specific-to-geography Italian Humanism, with a foundation in Italy and then growth throughout Europe from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It can be seen in the notion of deep education, or *Paideia* to the Greeks, or *Humanitas* to Cicero and reflected in the notion of *studia humanitatis* during its historical blossoming. Reflected in so many collected Western, and other thinkers, humanism itself tends to exist as a sensibility and to be an emergent trend rather than a distinct philosophical doctrine unto itself. Humanism in the national and international context differs in its definitions. Let's take a peak, together:

On the international level, the [International Humanist and Ethical Union](#) expressed humanism as a democratic and ethical life stance without theism and supernaturalism. Within the regional perspective, the European Humanist Federation views humanism as emphasizing human rights, thus bound implicitly within the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), and the rightness in respect for individual choice and personal responsibility.

At several national levels, The Council of Australian Humanist Societies paints humanism as an ethical life lived without extra-natural and external-to-humanity sources of meaning and ethics. Humanists UK exists within the frame of perspective on the absence of an afterlife, morals from care and concerns as the nature of human beings, and science and naturalism and a process and lens for knowledge about the world. The

Humanist Association of Ireland takes humanism as a combination of reason and compassion, harking back to the original point.

The Indian Humanist Association examines humanism within the contextualization of an ethic grounded in human perceptions and abilities, a scientific attitude, and an emphasis on communal harmony and social reform. Humanistisch Verbond/Humanistic Association Netherlands partakes of living together humanism with thinking for yourself as its centrality.

Romanian Secular-Humanist Association considers humanism as an ethic while also promoting critical thinking, scientific methodology, and the separation of church and state. New Zealand Humanists, succinctly states reason, science, and secularism as its basis. Humanist Society Scotland looks for a secular state in Scotland and the abolition of the privileges for the religious.

Humanist Society Singapore considers naturalism and non-theism as foundational, as well as emphasizing rights and responsibilities of individual human beings. The Swedish Humanist Association works within a humanistic frame of reason, compassion, and accountability. American Humanist Association thinks humanism comprises reason, compassion, and experience. Then, to the home turf, we can note Humanist Canada with reason and science to know the natural world, and dignity and compassion to live in the interpersonal one.

Even closer to home than the lawn, the Humanist Association of Toronto's constitution speaks to humanism as freedom of enquiry and the use of reason, an emphasis on human creativity and fallibility, and a natural world linked with a human-based and oriented ethics. The commonality of the history represents the bubbly trend. Humanism over time and geography emerges and then dissipates, as per the examples before.

A humanistic philosopher, ethical visionary, or community emerges and then fades away, but leaves a trace. This happens continually in the world thought record. This is a bubbling. Of course, as we all know, bubbles pop; hence, the emergence and then dissipation of them. The sensibilities across organizations, whether international, regional, national, or for a city, exhibit philosophical consistency while retaining open questions. As noted at the outset, this reflects the innumerable documents on offer.

These can include the *Humanist Manifesto I* (1933), *Amsterdam Declaration* (1952), *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), *A Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980), *A Declaration of Interdependence* (1988), *Humanism: Why, What, and What For, In 882 Words* (1996), *IHEU Minimum Statement on Humanism* (1996), *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call For A New Planetary Humanism*, *The Promise of Manifesto 2000*, *Amsterdam Declaration* (2002), *Humanist Manifesto III/Humanism and Its Aspirations* (2003), *Manifeste pour un humanisme contemporain/Manifesto for a contemporary humanism* (2012), and so on.

Certainly, more will become entertained into the future, in replicated or adapted format relevant for the time. The inherent incompleteness of systems in logical structure lead to some revelations about humanism's emphasis on science linked to its ethic. It may remain eternally incomplete to retain its consistency' by implication, dogmatic systems, of which assume completeness, become inconsistent in structure, haven't we noticed. Something that defines science is indefinite discovery; thus, humanism, with science included in itself, as an inevitable ethical and logical complement of this incompleteness.

Therein lies the insight to the question, "What is Canadian Humanism?" Through reflections on the state of Canadiana and Canadianisms, and humanism the world over, humanism, in its ethics and its scientific perspective, becomes inherently incomplete but self-consistent. It is this way via logical necessity. Its – humanism's – fundamentals remain the same while its flavor per culture changes. The basic facts of the world inform the ethics and the type of culture brings the different manifestations of humanism. The peculiarities of humanisms derivations simply reflect higher-order incorporations of the surrounding culture. Nonetheless, it retains its core principles of reason, compassion, and science.

Canadian humanism, as with all humanisms, exists as more question than answer, where the title gives the game away. The answer is in the question: what is Canadian Humanism? Canadian humanism is about compassion, reason, and science, but also about the surface presentations of a people: beaver hats, maple syrup, and double-double Tim Horton's coffees.