Reinterpreting Humanism Beyond Heidegger and Derrida

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Abstract. Traditional humanism assumes that the human nature is captured by defining the human being as "rational animal." Heidegger, in his *Letter on Humanism*, dismisses by arguing that this reduces existence within metaphysics. Derrida demonstrates how even post-metaphysical attempts at humanism, such as Heidegger's, remain haunted by the logic of presence, exclusion, and *différance*. The paper argues that humanism lies not in metaphysical certainty but in its openness to critique, reinterpretation, and reinvention which implies that the question of the human is unfinished, fragile, and ethically urgent. With this reinterpreted humanism, philosophy can then appropriately respond to the ethical, political, and ecological challenges of contemporary life.

Keywords: Humanism, *Dasein*, *Différance*, Deconstruction, Post-Metaphysical

Introduction

The question of humanism remains a central concern in twentieth-century continental philosophy, particularly in the writings of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. Traditional humanism, especially in its Enlightenment form, had defined human beings as rational, moral, and universal subjects. Heidegger (1947/1998), however, critiques this metaphysical grounding, arguing that reducing the human being to fixed categories obscures the concrete mode of human existence. Instead, he introduces the concept of *Dasein*, a being whose existence is defined not by essence but by its openness to Being. This existential reorientation reframes human existence as *ek-sistence*—a "standing out" into the truth of Being, historically situated and responsive to its disclosure.

Yet Heidegger's rethinking of humanism raises further questions. His concepts of Being, *ek-sistence*, and the "clearing" (*Lichtung*) risk creating new abstractions that parallel the metaphysical structures he critiques (Critchley, 1992; Kisiel, 2002). Jacques Derrida takes up this tension in his deconstructive project, most notably in *of Grammatology* (1967/1978),

showing that attempts to move beyond metaphysics remain entangled with metaphysical language. Derrida's notion of *différance* illustrates that meaning and existence are always deferred, never fully present, and thus resistant to definitive grounding.

This study examines the dialogue between Heidegger and Derrida to clarify the philosophical stakes of rethinking humanism. The central question guiding this inquiry is: How do Heidegger's critique of humanism and Derrida's deconstructive response jointly contribute to a rethinking of human existence? By situating Heidegger's critique and Derrida's response in conversation, the study illuminates how human existence cannot be reduced to metaphysical essence but must be continually interpreted. Beyond philosophical abstraction, this inquiry engages contemporary debates on subjectivity, meaning, and the ethical implications of understanding the human as open, finite, and interpretively constituted (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016).

The study proceeds in three parts: first, by examining Heidegger's critique of humanism; second, by analyzing Derrida's deconstructive response and its implications; and third, by reinterpreting humanism beyond Heidegger and Derrida.

Heidegger's Critique of Humanism

Heidegger's critique of humanism represents a foundational shift in twentieth-century philosophy, challenging the metaphysical assumptions that had long defined what it means to be human. Traditional humanism, particularly in its Enlightenment form, positioned humans as rational and moral agents whose essence could be objectively defined (Aristotle, 1984). Heidegger, however, argues that such definitions reduce human existence to abstract categories, obscuring the lived, concrete, and temporal nature of being (Heidegger, 1947/1998). In response, he proposes a rethinking of human existence through *Dasein*—a being that is always already situated in history, culture, and the disclosure of Being itself—and *ek-sistence*, a mode of standing out into the truth of Being (Heidegger, 1962). This reorientation not only destabilizes essentialist humanism but also opens the space for existential and interpretive engagement with the human condition, laying the groundwork for subsequent philosophical interrogations, including Derrida's deconstructive critique (Derrida, 1978; Caputo, 1987).

Dasein and Ek-sistence: Rethinking Human Being. Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* represents a radical departure from traditional humanism, insisting that human existence cannot be captured through

abstract predicates such as reason, morality, or essence (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Kisiel, 2002). *Dasein* is "being-there", a mode of existence characterized by its openness to the disclosure of Being itself.

Ek-sistence—literally "standing out" into Being—captures the dynamic nature of human existence. Unlike static conceptions of essence, *ek-sistence* emphasizes projection, care (*Sorge*), and temporal finitude (Heidegger, 1962). Humans are always oriented toward possibilities yet thrown (*Geworfenheit*) into circumstances not of their choosing. This duality—between thrownness and projection—forms the cornerstone of Heideggerian humanism: existence is always already situated, finite, and contingent, yet it carries the responsibility of choosing how to respond to possibilities (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016).

This reorientation challenges classical anthropocentric frameworks that posit humans as sovereign arbiters of universal reason (Aristotle, 1984; Marx, 1978). By reframing existence as *ek-sistence*, Heidegger relocates the locus of human value: it is not in possessing abstract traits but in the authentic engagement with one's temporal, finite, and historical situation (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Kisiel, 2002). *Dasein* becomes a site of interpretive openness rather than metaphysical closure.

The temporal dimension of *Dasein* is essential. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*) underscores the inevitability of finitude, revealing existential authenticity as a response to mortality (Heidegger, 1962). The human being, confronted with death, experiences an irreducible tension: freedom exists only because existence is finite; yet, this very finitude exposes human life to anxiety (*Angst*) and uncertainty (Caputo, 1987). Heideggerian humanism, therefore, is non-foundationalist: it refuses absolute grounding in reason or morality and insists on the interpretive, precarious nature of existence (Malpas, 2016).

Dasein's situatedness also carries ethical and political implications. By emphasizing relationality, care, and interdependence, Heidegger undermines the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous rationality (Critchley, 1992). Humanism must recognize the embeddedness of the human within social, historical, and ecological matrices, shifting ethical discourse from abstract universals to the lived responsibilities of *Dasein* in concrete contexts.

However, Heidegger's project is not without tension. While *ek-sistence* seeks to transcend metaphysics, articulating *Dasein*'s openness relies on conceptual mediation, which risks reintroducing abstraction in subtle forms (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Caputo, 1987). Heidegger's vocabulary—Being, *Lichtung* (the clearing), *ek-sistence*—functions as a conceptual scaffold that

paradoxically echoes essentialist tendencies. *Dasein* is thus simultaneously liberating (challenging essentialist humanism) and precarious (entangled with metaphysical language) (Critchley, 1992; Malpas, 2016). This tension lays the groundwork for Derrida's deconstructive intervention, which further destabilizes the relationship between humanism and metaphysics (Derrida, 1978; Derrida, 1997).

In sum, *Dasein* and *ek-sistence* represent a profound reconfiguration of humanism: humans are no longer defined by static properties but by their temporal, relational, and finite engagement with Being. Heidegger's critique destabilizes traditional humanism and simultaneously opens the space for continued philosophical reflection on the limits, responsibilities, and openness inherent in human existence (Caputo, 1987; Critchley, 1992; Malpas, 2016).

Overcoming Metaphysics and Its Limits. Heidegger's critique of humanism is inseparable from his broader project of overcoming metaphysics. Traditional humanism, particularly in its Enlightenment and classical forms, had long situated the human being within a framework of universals: rationality, morality, and essential characteristics that defined "man" as a metaphysical entity (Aristotle, 1984; Plato, 1997). Heidegger challenges this assumption, arguing that the tendency to ground human existence in abstract categories obscures the concrete, temporal, and situated nature of *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Kisiel, 2002). In other words, humanism, when entangled with metaphysics, reduces the human being to a predictable, objectifiable concept, overlooking the existential depth of lived experience.

The project of overcoming metaphysics is both radical and paradoxical. Heidegger's proposal requires a turning away from traditional ontological models that define being in terms of presence, essence, or fixed attributes, yet his own discourse relies on conceptual articulation—terms such as Being, *ek-sistence*, and *Lichtung* (the clearing) are themselves linguistic constructs that risk reintroducing the very abstraction he seeks to avoid (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016). Here emerges what can be called the "structural tension" of Heideggerian thought: while seeking to free human existence from metaphysical domination, Heidegger cannot entirely escape the metaphysical heritage of language itself (Critchley, 1992; Heidegger, 1962).

This tension is particularly evident when considering *Dasein*'s relationship with temporality and finitude. Heidegger emphasizes that the human being is thrown (*Geworfenheit*) into a world not chosen, yet

simultaneously projects toward possibilities (*Entwurf*), revealing the paradoxical structure of existence: freedom exists only within finitude, and understanding arises only through engagement with historical and cultural contexts (Heidegger, 1962; Caputo, 1987). By situating humanism within this existential frame, Heidegger destabilizes metaphysical humanism without claiming to offer a final, stable definition of the human. The human becomes an interpretive agent, constantly negotiating between the constraints of thrownness and the possibilities of projection, rather than a fixed essence.

Moreover, Heidegger's critique problematizes the very notion of autonomy and universality that classical humanism presumes. Human beings are not isolated rational subjects but beings whose existence is co-constituted with world, others, and history (Kisiel, 2002; Calarco, n.d.). Ethical, political, and existential responsibilities emerge from this situatedness, rather than from adherence to universal principles. Heidegger thereby anticipates contemporary critiques of humanism that foreground plurality, contingency, and ecological embeddedness (Malpas, 2016). In this sense, overcoming metaphysics is not merely a technical philosophical move but a reorientation of the human condition, demanding attentiveness to interdependence, temporality, and vulnerability.

Yet, the limits of Heidegger's project are unavoidable. His very vocabulary—Being, *ek-sistence*, *Lichtung*—reflects a linguistic mediation of existential truth, demonstrating that metaphysics is never fully abandoned. As Caputo (1987) notes, the attempt to overcome metaphysics is always haunted by the traces of metaphysical thinking; there is no pure, non-metaphysical description of human existence. In this light, Heideggerian humanism occupies a liminal space: it both destabilizes the metaphysical human and remains conditioned by the metaphysical structures it critiques.

This liminality has significant implications. First, it emphasizes that humanism is not a fixed doctrine to be eradicated but a problematic horizon, requiring constant interrogation and reinterpretation (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Malpas, 2016). Second, it prefigures Derrida's deconstructive analysis, which further exposes the aporetic nature of metaphysical concepts and demonstrates that critique and deconstruction are mutually dependent philosophical strategies (Derrida, 1978; Derrida, 1997). Finally, it challenges contemporary philosophy to navigate between grounding meaning and acknowledging its perpetual instability, a tension that lies at the core of the rethinking of humanism (Caputo, 1987; Critchley, 1992).

In sum, overcoming metaphysics in Heidegger's project is a dynamic, ongoing effort. It destabilizes essentialist humanism, foregrounds the

interpretive and temporal dimensions of *Dasein*, and situates humans within a relational, finite, and historical context. Yet, it remains an ambivalent enterprise, constrained by the very language and concepts that enable reflection. This ambivalence underscores the enduring philosophical challenge of thinking humanism beyond metaphysical constraints, a challenge that Derrida will later elaborate in his deconstructive project.

The Relevance of Heideggerian Humanism Today. The stakes of Heidegger's critique extend beyond abstract philosophy into contemporary debates on subjectivity, ethics, and human-centered thinking (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016). In a world increasingly attentive to plurality, contingency, and ecological interdependence, a Heideggerian humanism emphasizes that humans are finite, relational, and interpretively engaged beings, rather than sovereign rational subjects (Heidegger, 1947/1998; Critchley, 1992).

This perspective has practical implications: it encourages ethical responsibility grounded not in universal absolutes, but in situated understanding of one's historical, social, and ecological context (Calarco, n.d.; Marx, 1978). Moreover, it challenges any ideology or political system that assumes humans are fully autonomous or universally rational, foregrounding the complexity, vulnerability, and openness of existence (Caputo, 1987; Heidegger, 1962).

Finally, Heidegger's critique provides a crucial foundation for Derrida's deconstruction. By revealing the inescapable tension between humanism and metaphysics, Heidegger opens the way for Derrida's analysis of *différance* and textuality, which further destabilizes the assumptions underpinning traditional humanist thought (Derrida, 1978; Derrida, 1997). The dialogue between Heidegger and Derrida is therefore not a matter of simple opposition but a mutually illuminating interrogation of what it means to be human in a world where meaning is never fully secured.

Derrida's Deconstructive Response

Derrida engages Heidegger's critique of metaphysical humanism but radicalizes it in a way that exposes the persistent entanglement of thought with metaphysical structures. In *Of Grammatology* (1967/1978), Derrida recognizes Heidegger's displacement of traditional humanism, which reduces humans to rational or moral categories. Yet Derrida warns that Heidegger's attempt to retrieve an originary meaning of Being is itself a form of metaphysical thinking: it presupposes a stable, foundational ground that Heidegger seeks to transcend. This tension underscores the paradox of post-

metaphysical reflection—one cannot entirely escape metaphysical assumptions even while critiquing them (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016).

Central to Derrida's intervention is the concept of *différance*, which demonstrates that meaning is never fully present but always deferred. Every sign points to another in an endless chain of references, rendering language a site of play, absence, and relationality. As Derrida famously writes, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" ("there is nothing outside the text") (Derrida, 1978, p. 158). This does not deny reality; rather, it emphasizes that access to reality is always mediated through textuality, signs, and *différance*. Caputo (1987) clarifies that Derrida is not simply rejecting Heidegger but highlighting that even Heidegger's "step back" into Being is caught within the very structures of signification it aims to surpass. Derrida calls this persistent tension the trace: every attempt at presence carries within it the mark of absence, revealing the impossibility of fully grounding meaning.

The Tension Between Overcoming and Remaining in Metaphysics. The dialogue between Heidegger and Derrida exposes a profound philosophical paradox. Heidegger seeks to move beyond metaphysical humanism by redefining man as *ek-sistence*, emphasizing the historical, finite, and situational nature of *Dasein*. Yet the very language he uses—terms like "shepherd of Being" and "house of Being"—risks instituting a new abstraction, a quasi-essentialist framework that echoes the metaphysical structures he critiques (Critchley, 1992; Kisiel, 2002). Derrida shows that any attempt at retrieval, naming, or grounding is already inscribed in the movement of *différance*, making the effort both necessary and impossible.

Malpas (2016) calls this the "ambivalence of post-metaphysical thought": one is caught between the necessity of thinking beyond metaphysics and the impossibility of fully doing so. Heidegger's contribution lies in freeing humans from the reductive logic of rational-animal definitions, while Derrida reminds us that even this liberation remains entangled in metaphysical residues. The oscillation between critique and implication reveals that post-metaphysical reflection is both a liberation and a constraint, always negotiating between freedom and structural limitation.

Implications for Humanism and Subjectivity. The consequences of this dialogue for humanism and subjectivity are profound: (1) Humanism as essence is no longer viable. Heidegger demonstrates that defining humans through fixed predicates—reason, spirit, freedom—obscures the more fundamental openness of existence and the temporal unfolding of *ek-sistence* (Heidegger, 1947/1998); (2) Post-metaphysical humanism is

unstable. Derrida reveals that attempts to retrieve a more originary understanding of Being are contaminated by the very metaphysical assumptions they aim to leave behind. Even "Being" itself is a sign, caught within chains of *différance* (Derrida, 1978); and (3) Subjectivity must be rethought as openness-without-ground. Humans are neither fixed essences nor purely transcendental subjects. Instead, subjectivity is constituted relationally, by traces, and through the play of *différance*, emphasizing responsibility, finitude, and interpretive engagement (Critchley, 1992; Caputo, 1987).

Thus, Heidegger and Derrida do not offer a definitive foundation for humanism. Instead, they open a path toward a critical humanism—one that embraces fragility, finitude, and undecidability as intrinsic features of human existence. This approach gives rise to what Critchley (1992) calls an ethics of finitude, where responsibility emerges not from universal certainties but from the recognition of inherent limitations and incompleteness

The Cruciality of Humanism. Despite destabilizing metaphysical humanism, Heidegger and Derrida do not render humanism obsolete. The question, "what is the human?" persists, signaling the continued relevance of humanist inquiry. Abandoning humanism risks nihilism, relativism, or depoliticized indifference. Instead, a renewed, critical humanism is necessary—one that acknowledges fragility while retaining ethical urgency.

Why Humanism Cannot Be Discarded. Humanism provides the conceptual horizon for questions of dignity, responsibility, and meaning. Without it, philosophy risks severing itself from ethical and political realities. Taylor (1989) notes that modern identity is inseparable from struggles for authenticity and recognition, which require a humanist vocabulary. Eagleton (2008) affirms that humanism remains the indispensable "language of value," underpinning justice, solidarity, and emancipation. Heidegger and Derrida's critiques, therefore, call for transforming humanism, not abandoning it—preventing regressions into essentialism while sustaining engagement with human concerns.

Alternative Visions of Humanism. The post-metaphysical landscape offers diverse attempts to reconceptualize humanism: (1) For Levinas (1969), the human is defined by infinite responsibility to the Other. Ethics precedes ontology, and relationality, rather than essence, grounds dignity; (2) Habermas (1987) argues that norms of justice, recognition, and democracy presuppose intersubjective communication. Human beings'

unique capacity for dialogue generates shared lifeworlds, sustaining ethical and political humanism; (3) Rorty (1989) rejects metaphysical foundations but retains a moral orientation. Humanism persists through practices that reduce cruelty and promote solidarity rather than through philosophical essence; and (4) Thinkers like Spivak (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) situate humanism within struggles for justice, inclusion, and global recognition. These approaches expand humanism by addressing structural inequalities and historical exclusions.

These alternative humanisms demonstrate that humanism survives through ethical engagement and reinterpretation, rather than metaphysical certainty. Humanism becomes plural, contingent, and historically responsive, illustrating the richness of post-metaphysical thought

Dialectical Tension Between Critique and Affirmation. The interplay between Heidegger and Derrida reveals a persistent dialectical tension: Heidegger destabilizes traditional metaphysical humanism by exposing its reduction of the human to abstract categories such as reason or morality, while Derrida interrogates the very possibility of establishing a secure post-metaphysical foundation. Together, their engagement illuminates a fundamental oscillation in the project of humanism: it must be deconstructed to prevent dogmatism and essentialist closure, yet preserved to sustain ethical, existential, and political significance.

This dynamic tension constitutes the conceptual core of post-metaphysical humanism. It underscores a critical insight: critique alone risks dissolving the ethical and political horizon of humanism, reducing it to nihilism or relativism. Conversely, affirmation alone, without critical awareness, risks reproducing the metaphysical certainties that Heidegger sought to overcome. Derrida's notion of *différance* exemplifies this balance, revealing that the act of sustaining humanism must navigate between the trace of absence and the possibility of responsibility (Derrida, 1978; Caputo, 1987).

In practical terms, this oscillation shapes subjectivity, ethics, and interpretive responsibility. The human condition is neither a fixed essence nor a metaphysical abstraction; it is a locus of continuous negotiation between freedom and finitude, presence and absence, affirmation and critique. As Malpas (2016) notes, post-metaphysical thought must acknowledge this ambivalence, recognizing that every attempt to ground humanism encounters its limits, yet is ethically necessary to preserve engagement with lived experience and social reality.

Toward a Critical and Unfinished Humanism. From this dialectical engagement emerges a critical, unfinished humanism, a conception of the human that is dynamic, relational, and ethically oriented. It is defined by several interrelated features: (1) Humanism is not a fixed doctrine but a living orientation, capable of responding to the plurality of human experiences and historical contexts. It thrives precisely because it is open to reinterpretation and critical interrogation; (2) Human existence is finite, historically and culturally situated, and cannot be captured by universalizing abstractions. This recognition grounds humanism in the concrete reality of lived experience; (3) Responsibility, relationality, and attention to the Other constitute the ethical core of humanism. Post-metaphysical humanism does not seek transcendental grounding but insists on ethical accountability to others and to society; and (4) Continuous negotiation between critique and affirmation: Humanism is sustained through an ongoing dialogue between deconstruction and reaffirmation, between exposing conceptual limits and maintaining an ethical horizon.

This humanism is deliberately unfinished and contestable, reflecting the impossibility of establishing a permanent foundation while insisting on the ethical imperative to engage with the world. Its vitality lies in keeping the question of the human open, resisting both dogmatic closure and nihilistic dissolution. Far from presenting a final doctrine, it functions as an orientation or horizon—a continuous negotiation that preserves the relevance of humanism without succumbing to essentialist assumptions. Critchley (1992) and Malpas (2016) emphasize that such an approach sustains philosophy's accountability to ethical responsibility, historical change, and interpretive plurality, ensuring that humanism remains an active, reflective, and socially responsive project rather than a fixed metaphysical claim.

In sum, critical and unfinished humanism exemplifies a philosophy that is simultaneously skeptical and affirmative: skeptical of essentialist certainties, yet affirmative of ethical, relational, and interpretive engagement. It embodies a horizon of responsibility in which humanism is perpetually interrogated, reconstructed, and ethically enacted.

Conclusion: Humanism Beyond Heidegger and Derrida

The confrontation between Heidegger and Derrida over humanism reveals philosophy at its most unsettling yet most necessary juncture: the insistence on continually asking what it means to be human when every metaphysical certainty has collapsed. Heidegger's critique of metaphysical humanism exposes the dangers inherent in defining the human as a rational substance or autonomous essence. Such definitions, by reducing existence

to abstract categories, obscure the concrete reality of *Dasein*—a being that is historically situated, finite, and responsive to the disclosure of Being itself. His notion of *ek-sistence* reframes human existence not as the possession of fixed predicates but as a standing-out into the truth of Being, emphasizing the dynamic and situational character of human life. Yet even this reorientation carries the risk of reintroducing new forms of abstraction, highlighting the difficulty of fully escaping metaphysical thought (Critchley, 1992; Kisiel, 2002).

Derrida extends and radicalizes Heidegger's critique by demonstrating that even attempts to ground a "new" humanism are entangled within the play of *différance*. Meaning, he shows, is never fully present but always deferred, circulating through chains of signs and traces that resist absolute grounding. The very concepts Heidegger employs—"Being," "clearing," or "*ek-sistence*"—participate in linguistic and metaphysical structures that Derrida calls into question. In this sense, the dialogue between Heidegger and Derrida uncovers a fundamental tension: one cannot overcome metaphysics without simultaneously relying on its language. The trace, the play of absence within presence, and the perpetual deferral of meaning reveal that humanism, even when critically rethought, cannot escape the shadows of metaphysical inheritance (Caputo, 1987; Malpas, 2016).

Yet this confrontation does not render humanism obsolete. On the contrary, the very persistence of the question—"what is the human?"—testifies to the irreducible centrality of humanism. Abandoning it outright risks nihilism, relativism, or depoliticized indifference. Heidegger and Derrida, while dismantling essentialist definitions, open the possibility for a critical and unfinished humanism, one that acknowledges fragility, openness, and plurality as intrinsic to the human condition. This humanism is dynamic, relational, and ethically responsive: it recognizes finitude, situationality, and the ethical demands that emerge from our interrelations with others.

Alternative rearticulations of humanism further illustrate this enduring necessity. Levinas's ethical humanism emphasizes infinite responsibility to the Other, shifting focus from essence to relational ethics (Levinas, 1969). Habermas's communicative humanism underscores intersubjective dialogue as foundational to justice, recognition, and democracy (Habermas, 1987). Rorty's pragmatic humanism retains ethical orientation and solidarity without metaphysical grounding (Rorty, 1989). Postcolonial and feminist humanisms, articulated by thinkers such as Spivak (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), insist on addressing structural inequalities

and global recognition, situating humanism within concrete historical and cultural struggles. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that humanism persists not as a fixed doctrine but as an ethically, politically, and socially responsive horizon.

The conceptual core of post-metaphysical humanism resides in the dialectical tension between critique and affirmation. Heidegger destabilizes metaphysical humanism, showing the limitations of defining human existence through universal predicates. Derrida deconstructs any attempt to secure a new foundation, revealing the impossibility of fully escaping metaphysical entanglements. Yet, this oscillation is precisely what sustains humanism: it must be deconstructed to avoid dogmatism while simultaneously preserved to maintain ethical, political, and relational significance. It is within this interplay of critique and affirmation that humanism acquires its vitality, remaining accountable to the lived experiences of finitude, responsibility, and historical contingency.

In the contemporary world—characterized by technological transformation, ecological crisis, persistent social injustice, and the ethical dilemmas posed by artificial intelligence—the urgency of critical and unfinished humanism becomes even more pronounced. Philosophy cannot retreat into abstraction, nor can it reproduce outdated metaphysical frameworks. Instead, it must sustain the fragile yet indispensable question of the human, ensuring that thought remains attentive to ethical responsibility, historical change, interpretive plurality, and the openness that defines human existence. The challenge, therefore, is not to provide a final definition of humanism but to maintain it as an ongoing inquiry, a continuous negotiation between critique and affirmation, deconstruction and responsibility, grounded in both reflective thought and lived reality (Critchley, 1992; Malpas, 2016).

In this sense, the confrontation between Heidegger and Derrida, enriched by alternative humanisms, is not a conclusion but an opening—a methodological and ethical orientation that insists upon keeping the question of the human alive. Critical and unfinished humanism, then, does not offer closure but accountability: it affirms that human existence cannot be reduced to essence, yet neither can it be abandoned without sacrificing the ethical, political, and relational frameworks through which dignity, justice, and solidarity are realized. Philosophy's role is to nurture this openness, to hold humanism in tension, and to ensure that the question of the human remains ever-present, dynamically responsive, and ethically imperative.

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