

Will Spector

Dr. Wills

Hum-104

29 April 2024

Humanities vs. humanities: What's the Difference?

The Humanities is an area of study that explores the nature of being human. What does being a human entail? Davidson's Humes course offers a dive into this question via a multidisciplinary approach that strives to address each major aspect of the human. Strengthening one's understanding of the mind, the body, and the spirit, as well as an exploration of broader societal themes such as utopia and dystopia, contributes to a deeper understanding of the state of being human. Being human does not have a single definition. Rather, it is defined by infinite factors within (and some outside of) the three units.

In the first unit, we discussed the Turing Test, the Voight-Kamph test, and other investigations into whether a machine is intelligent (Robb). We then learned about similar concepts—namely, the bodily response theory and the judgment theory—that seek to answer whether machines can feel. These tests ultimately sought to define humanity by identifying factors that make us *not* human. In the second unit, we explored the possibilities of the body through physical exercises. We wrote about our experiences during these plenary sessions—some of my own observations included “my body is made to complete tasks, engage with others, stay alive,” and “my body has feelings—pain, fatigue, comfort, embarrassment, strength, anger” (Bory). The body unit did not seek to define humanity via comparison, but instead defined it through a thorough process of documenting its abilities and possibilities. In the third unit, we discussed the less physical aspects of our humanity. We discussed the spirit

through the lens of church practice, pentecostalism, and black spirituals (Pyle). This unit defined humanity through media that depicted the black experience in America—in order to continue defining humanity, we looked at the dehumanization of a people by another people. Each unit sought to expose different aspects of what makes us human: the first through comparing humans to technology, the second through our abilities, and the final through experiences of racism and dehumanization.

The second semester expanded our definition of Humanities with broad societal concepts like utopias, apocalypse, and the future. A theme emerged in the lectures and assigned readings: a recognition of a systemic problem, and an urge to reject the past in order to construct a fresh, just society. One of the first lectures of the semester introduced the Communist Manifesto, which set the tone for a semester largely based on manifestos as a vehicle for change. A focus on dance early in the semester allowed for a connection between the physical body and the need for change. Concepts found in Tristan Tzara's "Dada Manifesto" among similar pieces established a desire to move forward and anti-institution sentiments (Pyle). A look at Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* began our examination of those "othered" by society (Ewington). This theme continued in David Wojnarowicz's *Seven Miles a Second*, which described the experience of living in New York City with AIDs in the 1980s. This unit continued into the Act Up protest movement of the same time period, in which people came together in choreographies of protest to call for change. Humanities, then, is not only defined by individual concepts like mind, body, and spirit, but also holds implications about broader society in its definition. Humans are social creatures, and a human history is defined by change that we create. Humanities is the study of the human, but also the study of change; the study of protests, and manifestos, and movements that urge our species to continue moving forward and bettering ourselves.

Lowercase humanities, however, is not as easily explored. This term does not refer to a study—rather, it refers to what makes us *feel* human: the struggle to find meaning. I believe that this term cannot be confined to a stereotypical “definition.” We find meaning in emotion—in joy, in melancholy, in pure, unbounded love. We find meaning in struggle, in goal setting, in fighting for justice. We find meaning in enjoying food, or lying under trees. Being human is defined by an underlying desire to find meaning. For me, I believe that meaning can be found in the small things in life. With the right outlook, each little experience, each inconsequential moment, can become something beautiful. Dr. Boyer’s lecture on December 5 told a story of a friend whose meaning was shattered by the death of a close friend on 9/11. This person tried to find meaning in the coming years (Boyer). The lecture on October 17th discussed theater, a method of finding societal meaning through acting (Green). A guiding question at the beginning of our Spirit unit was “How does religion work to de-mechanize bodies and liberate people” (Wills). This question addresses people who are able to find liberation and meaning through religion. Dr. Boyer’s lecture at the end of the course mentioned our eternal struggle to “burn with a gemlike flame”—this pursuit, ultimately, encapsulates humanities (Boyer). Our lives are spent trying constantly to better ourselves in every sense of the phrase: through interests, through suffering, through love. These pursuits; our human endeavors to find meaning, are what define humanities. Each plenary included not only studies in the Humanities, but also in humanity, in feeling, in emotion

The Humanities is a study; it is a class and a department that explores the state of being human. humanities are different—they are internal; they are the undefinable forces that make us who we are. I believe that humanities are defined by our pursuit as individuals and as the human race to find meaning in our own lives and with this collective life that we share. Uppercase

Humanities, as an area of study, can help us consider the implications of our existence, or our lowercase humanities.

Works Cited

Bory, Alison. "Plenary" Hum-103, 5 October 2023, Davidson College, Union 900 Room.

Lecture.

Boyer, Patricio. "Plenary" Hum-103, 5 December 2023, Davidson College, Tyler-Tallman Hall.

Lecture.

Boyer, Patricio. "Plenary" Hum-104, 25 April 2024, Davidson College, Hance Auditorium.

Lecture.

Ewington, Amanda. "Plenary" Hum-104, 6 February 2024, Davidson College, Hance

Auditorium. Lecture.

Green, Sharon. "Plenary" Hum-103, 17 October 2023, Davidson College, Tyler-Tallman Hall.

Lecture.

Pyle, Marcus. "Plenary" Hum-103, 16 November 2023, Davidson College, Tyler-Tallman Hall.

Lecture.

Pyle, Marcus. "Plenary" Hum-104, 30 January 2024, Davidson College, Hance Auditorium.

Lecture.

Robb, David. "Plenary" Hum-103, 29 August 2023, Davidson College, Tyler-Tallman Hall.

Lecture.

Wills, Anne. "Plenary" Hum-103, 31 October 2023, Davidson College, Tyler-Tallman Hall.

Lecture.