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Spanish Humanism: A Trajectory of the Legacies of the Renaissance in Spain

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ABSTRACT

Spanish humanism, unlike its more radical counterparts in Italy or Germany, emerged as a gradual and integrative intellectual movement that sought harmony rather than rupture with the past. While Italian humanism was marked by a rediscovery of classical antiquity and German humanism became closely tied to the Protestant Reformation, the Spanish variant followed a unique trajectory shaped by the country's complex political, religious, and social landscape. Although its roots are often traced to the European Renaissance, Spanish humanism was not a simple imitation of external trends. Instead, it adapted classical and humanist principles to fit Spain's particular needs, blending theological reform, ethical inquiry, and educational modernization. One of the defining features of Spanish humanism was its close relationship with Christian tradition. Far from discarding religious frameworks, it often worked within them to promote moral reflection, civic responsibility, and a renewed focus on the individual. Influential movements such as Erasmism—inspired by the writings of Erasmus—encouraged critical thinking and inner piety, while the School of Salamanca, led by figures like Francisco de Vitoria, introduced early ideas of human rights, international law, and social justice. These currents laid the groundwork for a distinctive form of humanism that remained deeply rooted in Christian ethics while embracing reason, dialogue, and the dignity of the human being.

Keywords: Humanism; Renaissance; Spain; School of Salamanca; Erasmism

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1. Introduction

Spanish Humanism was a crucial intellectual movement that emerged during the Renaissance, intertwining classical learning with religious and philosophical thought. While Humanism flourished across Europe, Spain developed a unique trajectory influenced by its multicultural heritage, political consolidation, and the challenges posed by the Counter-Reformation. Scholars such as Antonio de Nebrija, Juan Luis Vives, and Francisco Sánchez made significant contributions to linguistic studies, educational reforms, and scientific reasoning, shaping the broader European intellectual landscape.

Despite its importance, Spanish Humanism has often been overshadowed by Italian and Northern European traditions in academic discourse. Recent research has sought to re-evaluate its impact, particularly in the realms of education, political thought, and scientific methodology. However, gaps remain in understanding how Spanish Humanists navigated the tension between religious orthodoxy and the ideals of free inquiry.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Spanish Humanism by examining its key figures, intellectual currents, and lasting influence within a broader European context. By exploring its contributions to the evolving relationship between knowledge, power, and cultural identity, this work highlights its relevance to contemporary discussions. Ultimately, it affirms the vital role of Spanish Humanism in shaping modern intellectual traditions.

Spanish Humanism has undergone significant transformations from its origins in the Renaissance to its contemporary expressions. As a result, this article traces its evolution across different historical periods, highlighting the intellectual currents, key figures, and ideological shifts that have shaped its development. And article's argument is divided by four principal parts:

The first section, *The Renaissance and the Birth of Spanish Humanism*, examines how humanist thought emerged in Spain during the 15th and 16th centuries, influenced by classical traditions and the broader European Renaissance. It explores the contributions of figures such as Juan Luis Vives, whose works laid the foundation for a distinctly Spanish form of humanism.

The second section, *The 18th Century: The Enlight-*

enment and the Evolution of Humanism, investigates how the Enlightenment redefined humanist ideals in Spain. This period saw a growing emphasis on reason, education, and reform, as thinkers sought to modernize Spanish society through scientific and philosophical inquiry.

The third section, *Liberalism and Krausism: The New Faces of Spanish Humanism in the 19th Century*, focuses on the ideological shifts that took place in the 19th century. It explores how liberalism and Krausism reshaped humanist thought, emphasizing moral philosophy, social progress, and the role of education in fostering civic responsibility.

Finally, *Echo of Spanish Humanism from the 20th Century to the Present* assesses the continued relevance of humanist principles in contemporary Spain. This section explores how humanist traditions have been reinterpreted in response to modern challenges, including democracy, globalization, and technological advancements.

By analyzing these distinct yet interconnected periods, this article seeks to demonstrate the enduring significance of Spanish Humanism and its impact on intellectual and cultural history.

2. Methodology

This study employs a historical and analytical approach to examine the evolution of Spanish humanism from its inception during the Renaissance to its transformation in the 19th century. The research is based on an extensive review of primary and secondary sources, focusing on historical texts, philosophical writings, and critical analyses by scholars in the field.

The data for this study were gathered from multiple sources, including three types of sources. First, original writings of key humanists such as Luis Vives, Feijoo, and Spanish Enlightenment thinkers. These texts were accessed through historical archives, digital repositories, and published editions. Second, scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and critical essays that analyze Spanish humanism. Key references include works by Luis Gil, Francisco Rico, and other historians and philosophers who have extensively studied the subject. And third, the historical documents, such as *The Constitution of Cádiz* and legal texts that reflect the transition of humanist ideals into Spanish liberalism.

As for the analytical methods, the textual analysis is the main method, which was used to examine primary sources and interpret their philosophical, theological, and social implications. Key themes were identified, including the transition from Scholasticism to humanism, the role of Erasmism, and the evolution of humanist values in Spanish society. At the same time, this article also used comparative analysis, as the study compares Spanish humanism with other European humanist traditions (Italian, German, and French) to highlight its unique characteristics. Last, the historical contextualization is also a necessary method for the study, because each phase of Spanish humanism was analyzed within its broader socio-political and cultural context, tracing its influence on intellectual movements such as the Enlightenment and liberalism.

While previous studies have explored specific aspects of Spanish humanism, this research adopts a comprehensive chronological approach, integrating multiple perspectives to provide a holistic understanding of its development. Additionally, new interpretations of primary sources were considered in light of recent scholarly debates.

This study is limited by the availability of certain historical documents, some of which exist only in manuscript form or restricted archives. Moreover, while the research draws from various historical periods, it focuses primarily on intellectual history rather than broader socio-political developments.

3. The Current State of the Research

Research into Spanish Humanism has evolved to encompass various historical periods, each marked by distinct intellectual movements and figures. Recent scholarship has provided deeper insights into these developments, particularly focusing on the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the 19th-century Krausist movement, and contemporary interpretations.

The Spanish Renaissance was a dynamic period for the emergence of humanist thought, influenced both by classical antiquity and Christian reform movements like Erasmism. Scholars such as Luis Gil ^[1] explore the social framework of Spanish Humanism (1500–1800), emphasizing its intellectual plurality and the integration of theological, philosophical, and philological elements. Juan Luis Vives stands as a central figure, promoting an ethical,

Christian Humanism centered on education and social welfare. His *Tratado del socorro de los pobres* underlines the moral responsibilities of human beings, prefiguring modern social thought.

The School of Salamanca, as examined by Jorge Roaro ^[2], represents a unique Spanish contribution to Renaissance Humanism. Thinkers like Francisco de Vitoria merged Scholastic logic with humanist values, laying groundwork for concepts such as international law and human dignity.

The reception of Erasmus in Spain, documented by Goñi Gaztambide ^[3] and Bataillon ^[4], reveals tensions between reformist and traditional Catholic elements, but also points to a vibrant intellectual engagement with humanist ideas.

In the Enlightenment, Spanish Humanism shifted toward reason, empirical science, and educational reform, with Benito Jerónimo Feijoo as a seminal figure. His *Teatro crítico universal* critiques superstition and advocates scientific thought. Paul Deacon ^[5] and Francisco Rico ^[6] reassess Enlightenment Humanism as a continuation and transformation of Renaissance ideals, where rationality is linked to social progress and civic responsibility. At the same time, José Luis Abellán ^[7] contributes to the critical historiography of Spanish thought, situating Enlightenment humanists within a broader European intellectual map.

The Enlightenment period, while sometimes viewed as peripheral to European trends, is increasingly recognized for its distinct contribution to modern Spanish identity and liberal traditions.

The 19th century ushered in a politicized humanism, with the Constitution of Cádiz ^[8] symbolizing liberal ideals rooted in Enlightenment thought. Krausism, introduced by Julián Sanz del Río, reoriented Spanish Humanism toward ethical idealism, social harmony, and pedagogical reform, shaping generations of educators and reformers.

Thinkers like Concepción Arenal embody the fusion of liberal, Krausist, and feminist humanist values, advocating for social justice and education reform.

Abellán ^[9] also analyzes the development of romantic liberalism, emphasizing how Krausism offered a metaphysical foundation for progressive ideologies. Contemporary research continues to explore how Spanish humanist principles evolve in response to democracy, globalization,

and technology. Joaquín Xirau^[10] reflects on humanism's educational dimensions and its enduring ethical framework for society.

Modern scholars like Francisco Rico^[6] argue that despite ideological shifts, the essence of Spanish Humanism - critical thinking, moral reflection, and cultural engagement - remains vital.

Today's academic work is increasingly interdisciplinary, linking historical humanist values with current debates in education, civil society, and digital ethics. This reflects a revival of interest in the Spanish humanist tradition not only as a historical legacy but as a living, adaptive intellectual resource.

The research landscape regarding Spanish Humanism - especially across these four periods - is rich, evolving, and multidimensional. Scholars emphasize that Spanish Humanism is not a monolith, but a dynamic tradition adapting across centuries: from the philological rigor of Nebrija and Vives, through the rational critique of Feijoo, to the moral idealism of Krausism, and into modern reflections on education, justice, and civic values. These studies are united by a concern for human dignity, reason, ethical life, and the transformative power of education, reinforcing the continued relevance of humanist principles in Spanish society.

3.1. The Renaissance and the Birth of Spanish Humanism

As Luis Gil states in the prologue of his magnum opus on Spanish humanism, "*in the history of Spanish humanism, there are no defining milestones that allow for a periodization similar to that of political or external history. Everything is gray, linear, without lights that highlight contrasts, nor accidents that diversify the landscape*"^[1]. As a result, it is barely possible to create a complete chronicle of Spanish humanism. Instead of a centralized eruption, the development of humanism in Spain seems more like a serene yet dynamic river, with the continuous emergence of new currents.

When discussing the origins of Spanish humanism, the conversation always traces back to the Renaissance. This movement, born in Italy, brought an enormous renewal to society, both in Spain and throughout Europe. Theology had been the most important field of knowledge

in the previous period, but from that moment on, it gave way to philology, which would become the fundamental discipline of humanism. Before the arrival of Renaissance humanism, Scholasticism was the absolute protagonist in Spanish thought, having already reached its peak. This theologically guided knowledge lost its dominant role before humanism, marking a transformation from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, which means that "man" would replace God as the centre of philosophical ideas.

Although the term "humanism" did not originally appear in the Renaissance, in the 19th century, German philosophers and writers definitively linked this word to the Renaissance movement, using it to describe the core spirit of this grand current. Today, humanism and the Renaissance are considered inseparable words, as Abellán writes in Volume II of his masterwork: "*The Renaissance movement cannot be understood without two of its fundamental tendencies: Humanism and the Reformation*"^[7].

The Renaissance in Spain is a controversial topic, both due to the limited influence of philological studies and the moderate attitude that appears more like a counter-reformation. As Abellán himself explains, "*it is evident that the Spanish Renaissance does not conform to the German and Italian models imposed by criticism, and consequently, its existence is denied*"^[7]. However, like Abellán, Spanish researchers have already attempted to clarify the existence of the Spanish Renaissance and highlight its unique characteristics. For example, by pointing out that "humanism itself was not always the same", Jorge Roaro proposes that "in Spain, humanism shared with Florentine humanism the same love for the culture of Antiquity but not the disdain for the Middle Ages". In this sense, the Renaissance reform in Spain sought to be more tempered and harmonious, considering the specific circumstances of Spanish society. For this reason, "*the position of Spanish humanists was much more realistic than that of their Italian counterparts and no less bold or innovative*"^[2].

It is impossible to discuss the beginnings of Spanish humanism without mentioning the School of Salamanca and Erasmism. The shift in thought from theocentrism to anthropocentrism largely depended on religious idea reforms. With the inevitable current of Renaissance humanism, at the University of Salamanca, a series of theologians, such as Francisco de Vitoria, began to rethink and

reinterpret their inherited texts in a different way. As a result, a renewal of theological ideas took place—they no longer focused so much on defending dogmas but rather on the conditions in which human beings lived.

Besides religion, the School of Salamanca focuses on a broad range of studies, including moral philosophy, epistemology, and metaphysics, as well as philology, politics, law, economics, and the natural sciences—covering almost every field of knowledge. However, beyond theoretical research, a significant characteristic of this school is its pragmatic interest in real-world issues, such as the fair treatment of Indigenous people and converts, the injustice of usury, or the threat of Protestant segregation ^[2].

If we combine this practical approach with the previous discussion on the Renaissance in Spain, we can see that this concern for concrete social issues is not only a feature of the School of Salamanca but also a hallmark of Spanish humanism. Moreover, from a broader perspective, it becomes evident that almost all intellectual movements that achieve widespread influence in Spain share this pragmatic nature—they always strive to adapt their ideas to the country's specific circumstances.

Erasmism is another key concept for understanding humanism, as the ideas of Erasmus had a profound and lasting influence on both the School of Salamanca and Spanish society in the following centuries. Compared to Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation, this Dutch humanist and Christian theologian continued to recognize the Pope's authority while also criticizing the abuses of the Catholic Church and calling for reform. His views aligned more closely with Spain's social circumstances at the time. However, in Spain, Erasmism took on a new meaning, described as *"a rich and complex movement, more religious than cultural, which aspired to eliminate the existing abuses in the Church and to reform Christian life, pastoral care, and Theology"* ^[3].

Regarding the humanist aspect of Erasmism, the most fundamental idea is equality. In the preface to the Spanish edition of *Enchiridion*, Erasmus' work on religious ideas, Bataillon describes how this new form of piety promoted by Erasmism places all Christians on an equal level and encourages the rejection of formalities such as rites, habits, or blessed objects ^[4]. According to Erasmus, all Christians are equal in their faith in God, and there is no need for the

authority of professional clergymen to validate their devotion. This idea of Christian equality also reflects the shift toward anthropocentrism in the humanist movement.

When discussing Erasmism in Spain, the name of Luis Vives is of decisive importance. This Valencian philosopher is considered the most prominent representative of Spanish Erasmism and an outstanding paradigm of Renaissance humanism in Spain. It is essential to highlight that Vives' Renaissance humanism is entirely different from its origins in the Italian Renaissance, as he maintained a distinct stance regarding humanism and traditional ideas:

"Alongside Erasmus and against the Italian Renaissance and German Protestantism, he does not conceive of humanism as a radical break with the venerable traditions of the Middle Ages. Rather, he sees it as an integrative renewal that continues these traditions to the extent that it denies them, and it denies them only to the necessary degree required to ensure their progressive and creative continuity" ^[10].

Vives' universal humanism aimed to initiate a broad integration that would allow Christianity to continue its ecumenical tradition, striving to harmoniously combine the freedom of human conscience with the sanctity of divine tradition, the indomitable aspirations of life with the rigorous demands of morality ^[10]. However, this moderate and objective stance led to persecution by the Inquisition against his family, even though he remained a devoted Catholic. His thinking transcended the limitations of his time, bringing him suffering and hardship.

De subventionem pauperum, one of Luis Vives' masterpieces, is known in Spanish as *El Tratado del socorro de los pobres (The Treatise on the Relief of the Poor)*. As its title suggests, this book focuses on the issue of poverty. By first analysing the origins of human necessity and misery, Vives proposes a comprehensive set of measures to prevent and eliminate begging, as well as to regulate the actions of civic institutions responsible for addressing this issue. From a Christian perspective, it emphasizes that what God gives to each person is not meant for them alone

and that true piety cannot exist without mutual aid and charity. It also highlights the necessity of work, training, and education as the main remedies for alleviating poverty in the city. Efforts should be made to distinguish between the truly poor and those who are not, and all individuals capable of working should do so for their own benefit and that of the community.

De Subventionem Pauperum clearly demonstrates that, in the figure of Vives, religious, humanist, and moralist thought are combined. He was a thinker concerned with the human being's worldview and, in this work, with society's marginalized, striving to awaken love and respect for human dignity among citizens. As this humanist philosopher writes at the end of the work:

"But beyond all this, the greatest reward will be the increase of mutual love among people, which will be realized by sharing benefits with sincerity and simplicity, without any suspicion of unworthiness. And ultimately, above all, we shall receive the incomparable heavenly reward of eternal bliss, which we have shown to be granted to alms born of charity, or of the love of God, and of one's neighbor for God's sake"^[11].

It can be observed that, although Luis Vives consistently emphasizes Christian belief, his focus ultimately centers on human beings, whose well-being is his greatest concern. In fact, it can be seen directly from the term "humanism" itself that the central focus of this philosophy is the human being. As introduced in the theoretical framework, the humanist movement corresponds to the shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, meaning that human beings replace God as the centre of the dominant ideology. However, among humanist philosophers, there are also significant differences regarding the core objective of their theories. As Joaquín Xirau analyses in his work on Hispanic humanism:

"In contrast to Erasmus and aristocratic humanism, which, with a disdainful attitude toward the uneducated masses, sets its highest ambition in formal perfection and

the emulation of classical models, Luis Vives represents a humanism with deeper roots. For him, the supreme ideal is not and cannot be found in the cultivation of classical literature or in the pursuit of glory or fame, but rather in the elevation and dignity of man—all men—regardless of their condition. The word 'humanism' regains its most authentic and original meaning, the one used by the Romans starting with Cicero and especially Seneca, to translate the Greek term 'philanthropy', meaning love for humanity"^[10].

According to his words, Xirau believes that the essence of humanism lies in love for humanity rather than in models or forms. According to Luis Vives, this philosophy must never lose its compassion for the people, especially the most disadvantaged groups. Therefore, the supreme ideal it seeks is the progress and dignity of all human beings. In other words, humanism originates from human existence and serves to contribute to humanity.

Regarding the influence of Renaissance humanism in Spain, as Francisco Rico points out, *"the greatest and most significant imprint of Humanism in Spain should not be sought in the peaks of philology or Latin poetry, which, though more or less elevated, are similar throughout Europe". But In Spain, "the impact of philological techniques is limited"*^[6]. Instead, the area where humanism had the greatest impact was in broad-based general education, which spread across vast sectors of society. A notable increase in the number of schools can be observed, with the core objective being the teaching of Latin. Although this educational goal was somewhat limited, these schools enabled a considerable portion of the population to acquire the basic knowledge of classical culture. Consequently, there was also an explosion in literature, spanning from Renaissance poetry to the Baroque period and encompassing numerous literary movements such as mysticism. Most notably, this era saw the emergence of Miguel de Cervantes as an undisputed literary figure. All these cultural achievements contributed to what is known as Spain's *Siglo de Oro* (Golden Age).

At this point, we can summarize that, from the 15th

century, Spanish humanism was born and reached its peak, lasting until the end of the 17th century with the conclusion of the *Siglo de Oro* and the fall of Habsburg rule. The birth of humanism coincided with the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age—but this was not merely a coincidence. Rather, humanism introduced to Spanish society the fundamental elements necessary for this transformation toward modernity. Among these factors were a new way of thinking and a completely different perspective on the world. According to Joaquín Xirau, “*Spanish humanism is the heroic attempt to preserve, both in spirit and action, the ecumenical unity of a world that is dividing*”^[10]. One could say that the emergence and spread of humanism in Spain were both a logical outcome and a courageous attempt by an ancient and traditional nation to confront the rising tide of new ideas.

After the 17th century, the term *humanism* appears much less frequently in historical documents about Spain, and little mention is made of its development or influence in the following centuries. In fact, much of the research on Spanish humanism does not address its presence after the 18th century. The main reason for this, as Rico writes, is that “*the finest fruits of the studia humanitatis wither in Spain as the House of Habsburg declines*”. In other words, its influence diminished. However, this does not mean that Spanish humanism disappeared. Instead, “*under the Bourbons, the slow revival of humanism in the form of criticism or neoclassicism already stems from other sources*”^[6]. In this sense, Spanish humanism continued to evolve in the following centuries, merging with newly emerging ideas and becoming a fundamental element of modern intellectual movements.

3.2. The 18th Century: The Enlightenment and the Evolution of Humanism

In the 18th century, a key term for both Spain and most of Europe was the Enlightenment. As previously mentioned in the historical context, the Enlightenment introduced Spain to advanced ideas such as reason, freedom, equality, and tolerance. Many of these Enlightenment ideas had already been proposed during the humanist movement, but in this *Century of Lights* under Bourbon reformism, they became intertwined with reason—the core of Enlightenment thought—and shook Spanish society even more

profoundly.

Rather than directly using the term *humanism*, Spanish intellectuals of this period preferred the word *humanity* to emphasize their connection with real, flesh-and-blood beings. By combining humanity with reason, these Enlightenment thinkers—such as Meléndez Valdés and Jovellanos—sought to reinforce human autonomy, strengthen individual self-confidence, and establish a way of thinking aligned with progress and the potential for improving the lives of all people. From these goals and aspirations to transform Spanish society and promote human development, it is possible to recognize the humanist component of the Enlightenment movement in Spain^[5]. This *Enlightened humanism* placed human beings at the centre of its focus, marking a clear distinction from *Christian Renaissance humanism*.

When discussing the Spanish Enlightenment, one cannot overlook the figure of Feijoo. Alongside Gregorio Mayans, this Benedictine monk was one of the most prominent figures of the Enlightenment movement in Spain. By declaring, “*I, a free citizen of the Republic of Letters, neither a slave to Aristotle nor an ally of his enemies, will always give preference, over any private authority, to what experience and reason dictate to me*”^[12], Feijoo epitomized the key intellectual tendencies of the 18th century: the struggle against intellectual tyranny, adherence to reason and experience, and the desire to encompass all human knowledge in an encyclopedic manner.

Furthermore, Feijoo’s discourse on women’s rights, *Defensa de las mujeres (Defense of Women)*, is considered the first treatise on Spanish feminism. In this work, Feijoo defends the intellectual equality of men and women, criticizing the prevailing view of his time that considered women inferior. He also advocates for women’s right to access scientific knowledge and high culture. Feijoo’s ideas had a significant influence on later intellectuals, including Concepción Arenal, the legal expert, thinker and journalist of the 19th century. The article *Juicio crítico de las obras de Feijoo (Critical Judgment of Feijoo’s Works)* of this author contains her commentary on this Enlightenment philosopher. She describes Feijoo as “a reformer, not a rebel, an enemy of superstition” who “*fought ahead of his time and even ahead of ours, because very few today still uphold, as Feijoo did, the aptitude of women for all*

branches of science and higher knowledge, as well as their equality”^[13].

3.3. Liberalism and Krausism: The New Faces of Spanish Humanism in the 19th Century

Upon entering the 19th century, the term *humanism* nearly disappears from Spanish history. This can be inferred from the title of Luis Gil’s comprehensive work on Spanish humanism, *Panorama social del humanismo español (1500-1800)*, which suggests that after the 18th century, there were hardly any new developments or influences of this philosophical tradition in Spain. If we examine the trajectory of this humanist movement over the centuries, two key characteristics stand out:

First, as has been reiterated many times, Spanish humanism was never a radical break with tradition; rather, it sought to transform society and the national spirit in a harmonious way. Second, the definition of *humanism* can be quite broad, as it has always adapted to new movements while preserving its core principles—equality, freedom, and humanity. Roaro provides a precise summary of the trajectory of Spanish humanism, which is worth quoting in full:

“It could be said that, in general terms, Humanism in the Hispanic world was born within Scholasticism, and not in opposition to it, and that only over the centuries did it eventually diversify into numerous secular variants, which flourished literarily among the poets and playwrights of the Baroque, and later, in a different form, among the scientists and Enlightenment thinkers of the Bourbon reform era”^[2].

According to Roaro, Spanish humanism evolved into different variations, merging with the ideas and movements of each era. So far, the history of humanist thought in Spain has been traced from its origins to the 18th century, and now the question arises: Did new forms of humanism emerge in the 19th century, despite the difficulty of identifying them? Undoubtedly, the answer must be yes. From the moment of its birth, humanist ideals gradually became a shared consciousness among all people, continuing to ex-

ist from that time to the present, permeating nearly every aspect of human society. As Xirau describes:

“The affirmation of freedom, in opposition to authority and tradition, is the fertile seed of all aspirations, fervours, hopes, oppositions, struggles, glories, and catastrophes that have unfolded in Europe since the beginnings of modern history”^[10].

When reading 19th-century Spanish history, one can detect many echoes of humanism. Among them, *liberalism*, as one of the dominant movements of the century, is an important avenue for tracing these echoes. *Freedom* is a fundamental and significant idea for both humanism and liberalism, and many characteristics of Spanish liberalism align closely with humanist ideals.

During the War of Independence at the beginning of the 19th century, the number and strength of liberals grew day by day in Spain, leading to the creation of the Constitution of Cádiz in 1812. This constitution is both Spain’s first constitution and a fundamental document for understanding Spanish liberalism. According to Suanzes-Carpegna, although Spanish liberalism was not born in the Cortes of Cádiz, never before had liberalism been expressed in Spain as clearly and forcefully as in Cádiz^[14]. The Constitution of 1812 is a remarkable compilation of the ideas of the Cortes, providing a comprehensive response to Spain’s political, constitutional, economic, and social issues.

As have mentioned, 19th-century liberalism largely contains echoes of Spanish humanism, and as the most relevant representative of this current, the Constitution of Cádiz shows a strong influence of humanism. For example, regarding the situation of prisoners in jails, ARTICLE 297 mandates that prisons should serve to secure inmates rather than to harass them, and ARTICLE 303 prohibits the use of torture and coercion^[8]. These articles reflect a typically Enlightenment-inspired philanthropy that originates from humanism. In this sense, the liberalism of the early 19th century has an evident humanist character.

Furthermore, humanist ideas not only appeared in the Cortes of Cádiz but continued throughout all of 19th-century Spanish liberalism. This can be exemplified by a

series of specific policies: during the *Sexenio Democrático* (Six-Year Democracy), the Constituent Cortes abolished slavery and the death penalty in all Spanish territories; the penitentiary reform initiated in Cádiz continued to be implemented; at the same time, efforts were made to improve the living conditions of both the working class and women. “*This ethical and moral content of Spanish democratic liberalism was a common trait across all its internal tendencies and inspired the revolutionary experiences of 1854 and 1868*”^[14], Suanzes-Carpegna commented.

During this period, another intellectual movement closely connected to humanism was Krausism, one of the most significant philosophies in 19th-century Spain. Compared to Hegelian philosophy, Krausism sought to establish a more harmonious middle path between the two most prominent and completely opposing branches of German thought: Idealism and Materialism. Without a doubt, Krause’s ideas were better suited to Spanish society at the time, which was unable to abruptly shift in a completely different direction. As a result, a large number of Krausists emerged in Spain, seeking ways to reconcile the conflict between the “two Spains”—that is, tradition and modernization.

At the same time, it is evident that the aims and ideas of the Krausists closely aligned with those of Spanish liberals. These two schools of thought were not separate but were internally and mutually connected. Abellán defines their relationship as follows: “*Liberalism and Krausism mutually imply one another, to the extent that the former reaches its highest philosophical and political expression in the latter*”^[9]. According to his words, Krausism provided Spanish liberalism with a more refined theoretical foundation. Like two sides of the same coin, both movements had deep roots in the soil of humanism.

Sanz del Río, the founder and leading figure of Spanish Krausism, defined this philosophy as “*an attempt at individual and social practical philosophy*”^[15]. In other words, it was not a political revolution that directly sought to change the government system or regime but rather an effort to reform society by shaping the mindset of each individual. What Sanz del Río aimed to achieve through the dissemination of Krause’s philosophy was a systematic ideology capable of disciplining the fragmented Spanish mindset, a moral system that would free people from idolatry

and superstition, and ultimately, an educational method^[16]. For this reason, one of his main motives in introducing Krause’s works to Spain was to help alleviate the spiritual disorientation of the people, which also aligns with the principles of humanism—always attentive to human emotions and well-being.

3.4. Echo of the Spanish Humanism from the 20th Century to the Present

The same as the 19th century, although after the 20th century, the term humanism nearly disappears from Spanish history, the Spanish humanism still merges with the ideas and movements. Spanish Humanism in the 20th and 21st centuries has evolved in response to major historical, political, and cultural shifts.

While rooted in the classical and Renaissance traditions, modern Spanish humanism has evolved in response to significant historical and cultural shifts, including the Francoist dictatorship, the transition to democracy, increasing globalization, and rapid technological advancements. Under Franco’s regime, for instance, humanist thought was often suppressed or reinterpreted within authoritarian frameworks, prompting intellectuals to find subtle ways to preserve ethical and rational discourse. With the return to democracy in the late 20th century, there was a revival of liberal and educational values aligned with traditional humanist principles. Globalization introduced both opportunities and tensions, as Spanish thinkers grappled with cultural homogenization and the need to preserve national identity. Meanwhile, digital technologies raised new questions about ethics, communication, and the role of education. Throughout these developments, Spanish intellectuals, educators, and writers have consistently worked to uphold core humanist values—such as reason, ethics, education, and social justice—while adapting them to address the complex realities of contemporary society.

The early 20th century was marked by a flourishing of humanist thought in some representative movements and authors, particularly during Spain’s Silver Age (Generación del 98 and Generación del 27). Thinkers such as Miguel de Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset, and María Zambrano emphasized existential reflection, cultural renewal, and the role of philosophy in understanding Spain’s identity. However, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and

the subsequent Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) severely restricted intellectual freedom. Many humanist scholars were exiled or silenced, though some continued their work abroad or in underground circles.

After the transition to democracy in the late 20th century, Spanish humanism regained strength as the country opened up to new cultural, political, and intellectual influences. The process of European integration exposed Spain to broader humanist currents, encouraging dialogue around shared values such as human dignity, secular governance, and social justice. Globalization further expanded the scope of humanist concerns by introducing challenges related to cultural identity, economic inequality, and the ethical use of emerging technologies. Advances in science and technology also prompted humanist thinkers to reflect on issues such as digital rights, bioethics, and the societal implications of artificial intelligence.

The Free Institution of Education (La Institución Libre de Enseñanza), originally founded in the 19th century as a progressive and secular alternative to traditional education, served as a model for modern approaches to teaching and intellectual inquiry. Its legacy inspired a renewed emphasis on education as a means of cultivating critical thinking, civic responsibility, and moral autonomy in democratic Spain.

Contemporary humanist movements now engage with a range of pressing global and local issues, including the defense of human rights, the ethical implications of technological development, environmental sustainability in the face of climate change, and the challenges of fostering inclusive multicultural societies. Public intellectuals like Fernando Savater have played a key role in shaping this discourse. Through his writings and media presence, Savater has promoted a philosophy grounded in rationalism, secular ethics, and the importance of critical thought as tools for individual and collective progress in modern Spain.

4. Conclusions on Spanish Humanism

Spanish Humanism, born during the Renaissance and continually reshaped across centuries, stands as a testament to the enduring dialogue between cultural heritage and intellectual innovation. From its classical roots in the 15th and 16th centuries - through the pioneering contributions

of thinkers like Juan Luis Vives - Humanism in Spain has reflected both the spirit of its time and a persistent commitment to human dignity, knowledge, and social progress.

Each historical moment explored in this article reveals a dynamic reinterpretation of humanist values. The Enlightenment of the 18th century infused Spanish Humanism with reason and reformist zeal; the 19th century introduced liberal and Krausist perspectives that broadened its moral and civic dimensions; and the 20th century to the present day has seen humanism adapt to democratic ideals and global challenges while remaining rooted in its foundational principles.

Together, these transformations illustrate that Spanish Humanism is not a static legacy of the past, but a living intellectual tradition - one that continues to shape Spain's cultural identity and its contributions to global thought. In Spain, humanism was not merely a consequence of the grand Renaissance movement in Italy; it was also a natural flowering of the country's own centuries-old history - a reflection and an effort by an ancient people to bring harmony to a world facing divisions and conflicts. To conclude, it is worth citing Xirau's moving reflection on Spanish humanism:

"Hispanic humanism is not merely an echo of foreign voices, as some shallow minds may believe. We have ancestors, old and illustrious forebears, and we must honour them. Only by doing so will we fulfill our destiny and contribute to the salvation of the world. And we will be able to say with truth: 'I know who I am.'"^[10]

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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