

The Great Truth about Humans

William M. Farmer

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Almost everyone knows that we live on the surface of a spinning sphere that orbits a star. Yet it took thousands of years for this truth to be discovered, expressed, understood, and accepted. The evidence in support of it that has been compiled over the years now overwhelms any argument against it.

The undeniable fact that we live on a beautiful planet orbiting the sun is more than just a truth. It is a *great truth* because it has profound consequences. It tells us that the earth is our home and that our home is just a small component of a magnificent universe. It answers part of the question of who we are by explaining where we live. It also helps us to look beyond our world and to see ourselves from the outside.

Another great truth is that there is a set of traits that all healthy and whole humans possess, that defines what it means to be human, and that elevates human beings above all other known forms of life. There is no definitive account of what these traits are, but they certainly include the capacity to love, hate, suffer, and be happy; the desire to explore, create, communicate, control, and be free; the ability to learn, reason, remember, and self-reflect; and the appreciation of beauty, goodness, and “the presence of God.”

This set of traits is commonly called the *human spirit*. Humans in all cultures, living on all parts of the earth have exhibited the human spirit for thousands and thousands of years. It is something uniquely human. Although some animals such as the great apes, elephants, and whales exhibit some amazingly human-like traits, humans stand apart from all other life on earth. There is nothing else in the universe—that we know of—like us. The human spirit is what makes humans truly special. It is what compels people to say that we have been created in the “image of God.”

But is it really a truth that all healthy and whole humans possess the same human spirit? The evidence for this truth about humans, like the evidence for the truth about the earth, is overwhelming. In every part of the world, in every moment in human history and prehistory, humans have exhibited the human spirit in their culture and creations. A story, artwork, or artifact created by people in one place and time can resonate with people across the planet and across time.

An ancient Greek tragedy can grip a person today just like it did well over two thousand years ago in Athens. A lyric poem about, for example, how nature inspires a young man's love of a woman or how the delight in seeing a field of daffodils is fondly remembered can be understood and admired across all of humanity. The Paleolithic art of Lascaux is still a brilliant expression of the beauty of horses 170 centuries after it was created because the people who visited those caves share with us today the same human appreciation of beauty.

Of course, there are many incidental traits that differentiate humans from each other. Our skin, hair, and eyes have different colors; we have different sexes and sexual orientation; we have different DNA; some of us are right handed and others are left handed; we are born at different times and in different communities; we speak different languages and follow different ideas and religions; and we dress differently and have different tastes and interests. Over the ages, and even today, people have often considered these incidental traits to be of great significance. But they are only surface traits; they do not run deep. As Mark Twain once said, "We are all alike, on the inside." We are homo sapiens; we are united in our inherent equality. Moreover, what makes us the same is immensely more significant than what makes us different.

This truth is a great truth because it has great consequences. It says that humans living today, in the past, and in the future are all members of one family. We are all brothers and sisters that share a common set of traits that define us as humans and bind us to each other. We share the same home and the same destiny. Like all families, the great family of humans is not free of conflict. There are members who have been severely damaged by misfortune and the actions of others. There are also members who deny this truth and act in opposition to it. Every person who ever lived is part of this family, the great and the small, the good and the bad.

A Yazidi girl sold into slavery is our sister, and an ISIS fighter who buys her for pleasure is our brother. The people of the Philippines who are being murdered for suffering from drug addiction and the government-encouraged

vigilantes who are killing them are all members of our family. Every member of the human family is a spectacular being, a marvel worthy of the greatest consideration.

The accomplishments of humanity belong to all humans. When Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon as the first human to visit another body in the universe and said, “That’s one small step for (a) man, one giant leap for mankind,” he was rightfully acknowledging a great achievement that belongs to the entire human family. Human failures also belong to all humans. Such things as the many wars of the past and present, the Holocaust and other genocidal catastrophes, slavery, human-induced famine, and tyrannical rule are failures of humanity. As one family, we should take pride in our accomplishments as well as take responsibility for our failures.

Yes, the universal human spirit is not a theory, not a dream, not an ideology. It is a great truth just like the great truth about the earth. Of course, some people will say that the statement that humans share a set of defining traits is not a truth and that humans have essential differences. Let us ask all those who repudiate the existence of the universal human spirit to put forth their arguments and to lay out their evidence—to show us, so to speak, that the earth is indeed flat.

This truth about humans is the foundation of human rights, democracy, and the great religions, and it directly contradicts slavery, racism, nationalism, monarchism, colonialism, authoritarianism, misogyny, bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, islamophobia, and other ideas that are founded upon notions of fundamental human inequality.

This truth is deeply intertwined in the fabric from which the United States of America is made. It has proudly raised its head at every key moment in American history starting with this powerful sentence in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

America’s manifest destiny is to affirm the great truth about humans. America’s history is a long, slow, painful, and often bloody widening and deepening of America’s commitment to this truth.

This truth was at the core of Civil War as Abraham Lincoln so brilliantly expressed in his address at Gettysburg. This truth is what motivated the

suffragettes to fight for and ultimately win the right for American women to vote. This truth is the foundation of the Civil Rights movement and the vision Martin Luther King described in his “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. This truth is why the Supreme Court decided that marriage is for all people who love each other. And this truth is what caused America, despite a long, terrible history of treating African Americans as an inferior race, to twice elect an African-American president. America’s greatest gift to the world is its 240-year demonstration that a nation based on this truth—that all humans share the human spirit and are equal members of a great family—can offer its citizens hope and prosperity and can lead the world as a whole to successes that were once considered unimaginable.

Unlike the great truth about the earth, the great truth about humans is not universally recognized today. Many people do not yet see that there is a universal human spirit that unites us all and makes us all members of a common human family. Some people are even actively fighting against this truth, saying that the certain people should be excluded from their families, clans, or countries because these certain people are too different, too defective, or too unequal to be accepted. Yet the world’s greatest problems today—military conflict, poverty, political failure, technological disruption, and climate change—are truly global problems. They can only be solved if we all acknowledge that we are members of one family sharing the same home and the same set of common traits.

This is a decisive time for the United States, the most powerful country in human history, the greatest champion of the human spirit, to proclaim to the world by its words and deeds that humans share a common destiny and belong to a great family. If the current United States government is unwilling to fight for this truth, then the American people—for the sake of humanity—must step ahead of their government and lead this fight on their own.