in many ways Existentialism, as a philosophical movement has been eclipsed by two philosophical movements that developed in France after Sartre although Sartre lived long enough to see both these developments

the first movement is referred to as “structuralism” developed from the work of the Anthropologist-philosopher Claude Levi-Strauss main idea—an anthropological insight he noticed the structural similarities across different cultures which all societies shared in his various studies of myths, customs, traditions he sought to find the set of structures common to all societies despite his search for universals he clearly had an anthropologist’s view of the world what he attacked in Sartre is the notion that what Sartre gives us is not the universal picture of humanity but a hyper-intellectual Parisian who takes his phenomenological analysis as an unwarranted generalization for all humans makes claims about what human consciousness is like

Levi-Strauss discovered in his search for universals, profound differences in the human consciousness found within different cultures Merleau-Ponty made a similar criticism when he asked Sartre whether a peasant in Latin America who has never been educated, who has no idea of other cultures can be expected to have the same kind of choices the same responsibility Sartre claims for all humans

the second movement is often referred to a “post-structuralism” or “postmodernism” the key figures are Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Roland Barthes this movement is influenced largely by a reading of Nietzsche as well as the later Heidegger Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” in which he distanced himself from Sartre can be regarded as a starting point

one of the main themes of this movement is to trace and reveal hidden assumptions at work in the history of Western philosophy one decisive assumption is that of subjectivity an assumption that has framed all of modern philosophy since Descartes this notion of subjectivity is tied to the notion of humanism humanism developed as a central component of the Enlightenment project humanism is connected with the whole notion of modernity modernity arose as a rejection of authority in favor of a humanism that was based on the idea of a self-conscious subject who uses reason to discover principles that would be the foundation for morality and for politics for all humans the notion, for example, of human rights the notion of rights that are basic and inalienable for all human beings is a good example of the humanism of the Enlightenment

both structuralism and post-structuralism can be understood as a development of a decentering of the subject and a critique of humanism that had already been developing for some time
Decentering the Subject

in what sense does Enlightenment rationalism privilege the subject?

starting point of modern philosophy: Descartes “I think, therefore, I am”

the certainty of self-consciousness

mind as an isolated subject

subject as the site of knowledge

and the source of values

human reason, subjectivity, will be responsible for the validity of its own beliefs, values, decisions

human reason regarded as the sole arbiter of truth, goodness, justice

Enlightenment as rejection of authoritarianism

the received wisdom of the past, or superstition

knowledge, values, and even political power

placed on a new and more secure, because more rational, foundation

central preoccupations of the Enlightenment will be:

epistemology—establishing foundation for knowledge

and moral philosophy—providing rational foundation for morality

Descartes’ starting point conceived the mind as mirror of nature

had to work out from the certainty of self-consciousness to prove

that the ideas of mind as subject

could be accurate reflections of an objective world

Hume’s scepticism had demonstrated the impossibility of this project

seeming to pull the rug out from under the Enlightenment

Kant sought to save the Enlightenment

by depersonalizing the subject

the subject as transcendental subject

abstract mind

a reconstruction of the cognitive capacities of rational beings in general

emerging alongside rationalism were a variety of forms of moral and political individualism

Protestant Reformation turned to the individual conscience rather than authority of priests

Liberalism: the right of the individual to a ‘private sphere’ free from external influence

ideal of democracy centers on the right of individuals to determine their own government

however, during 19th century a series of developments lead to decentering of the subject:

could be said to have even begun with Kant

with the crucial arguments of The Critique of Pure Reason

the transcendental deduction of the categories of the mind

his arguments to prove the universal structures of the mind

were thought by many to have failed

Hegel was unconvinced of the transcendental deductions

Hegel thus historicizes and collectivizes the Kantian subject

the individual subject is only a particular manifestation of the ‘Absolute’
or ‘spirit’ (Geist) which unfolds through history
the subject is thus in some sense decentered
but Hegel still holds on to the Enlightenment goals
by conceiving of a fully rational subject at the end of history
the subject who sees the necessity of the historical process or ‘dialectic’

Marx materializes the already historicized subject of Hegelian idealism
consciousness depends on the achievements and limitations of a collective subject
consciousness depends upon class
our beliefs, attitudes, even our most deeply held moral values, reflect our position in society
the Enlightenment commitment to liberty, fraternity and equality
are a reflection of bourgeois conscience, and ultimately self-interest
the subject is decentered
but the privileges of the subject are displaced not abolished
transferred to a collective subject, the proletariat

Freud’s exploration of the unconscious mind further decenters the subject
the status of the conscious subject is questioned
consciousness never gives us more than a partial and distorted view of our mental life
the individual subject does not even know its own mind
we may be dupes of the unconscious
just as for Marx we are dupes of history and class
but psychoanalysis does hold out some hope for the conscious self in a recovery of its sovereignty
and thus, like Hegelianism and Marxism, though the position of the subject is decentered
there is not a complete break from humanism

Hegelian idealism, Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis
all retain some role for the subject, if limited or qualified in some way
thus they all remain committed with humanist assumptions

a more decisive break comes with hermeneutics and linguistics
hermeneutics developed in 19th century in response to the problem of interpretation of texts
particularly biblical texts, where considerable distance in history, culture and language
separates the reader, the interpreter, from the text

what is the point of interpretation?
Is it to recover the original meaning of the text?
But where is that found, in the intentions of an author?
can one overcome the tremendous distances that separate author and reader?

it gradually became evident that this problem of interpreting biblical texts
was the same problem one faces in interpreting any text
any utterance whatsoever
involving a speaker or author (the subject of the discourse)
and auditor or reader
and thus hermeneutics developed into
a philosophy concerned with the problem of interpretation in general

in working through the problem of interpreting biblical texts
it became more and more clear that to understand any text or utterance
involved knowing something of the context, both social and linguistic
in which the text was produced
thus the meaning of the text cannot be traced solely to the subject of the discourse
thus the subject is also here somewhat displaced or decentered

in traditional hermeneutics the assumption was that the meaning of the text
could be found in a recovery of the intentions of the author
Dilthey, for example, thought that the original intentions of the author could be recovered
through greater knowledge of the broader cultural and linguistic context
thus, again, though the subject is decentered there is no complete break with humanism

the radical implications for hermeneutics of *Being and Time* undermine this assumption
and thus signal a decisive break with humanist assumptions
Heidegger’s conception of Dasein as a being-in-the-world
undermines the assumption that one can ever escape the frame of the world we are thrown into
one cannot recover the original intentions of the author
(perhaps another sense in which one might understand the ‘death of God’)

Cartesian dualism with its complete separation of subject and object
led to an overemphasis on the subject within epistemology
and an ‘objectification’ of the world in metaphysics
Heidegger’s radical attempt to overcome Cartesian dualism
undermines both traditional epistemology and metaphysics

in *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to distance himself from both
the subjectivism of modern epistemology
and from the objectification of the world
much of Heidegger’s later thought concerns the destructive tendencies
of instrumental or technological thinking that reduces everything to
an object for a subject

in distancing himself from the radical subjectivism of modern thought
Heidegger also distances himself from the humanism that is framed by that conception
thus we can understand Heidegger’s explicit rejection of Sartre
and thus existentialism as defined by Sartre
and the humanism that is also defended by Sartre

even though he tried to follow Heidegger’s conception of being-in-the-world
in “Existentialism is a Humanism” Sartre explicitly affirms the Cartesian starting point
‘one must take subjectivity as his point of departure’

Heidegger develops in his later thought a conception of ‘thinking’
that takes place outside the frame of ‘Western metaphysics’
by which Heidegger means the whole tradition of Western philosophy that proceeds from
the forgetfulness of Being in Greek philosophy
that leads to the development of modern philosophy
framed by the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy
this ‘thinking’ will not be understood as the directed activity of a self-conscious subject
who understands everything in terms of what it can be for itself
but rather a ‘thinking’ that will be understood as an impersonal openness or receptivity to the world

anti-humanism in Heidegger’s sense is not equivalent to the assertion of the worthlessness of human life
anti-humanism is not an affirmation of inhumanity
it is instead a rejection of any philosophy that reduces the worth of things to what they can be for a subject

Heidegger reads Nietzsche as the ‘last metaphysician’
rather than overcoming metaphysics and the nihilism that results from it
Nietzsche’s perspectivism, according to Heidegger,
is the culmination of the radical subjectivism of modern philosophy

and yet, there is already in Nietzsche a rejection of the arrogant premise of humanism:

The whole pose of “man against the world,” of man as a “world-negating principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting—the monstrous insipidity of this pose has finally come home to us and we are sick of it. We laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of “man and world,” separated by the sublime presumption of the little world “and.” But look, when we laugh like that, have we not simply carried the contempt for man one step further? Also thus pessimism, the contempt for that existence which is knowable by us? (The Gay Science, 347)

humanism is held responsible for many of the characteristic vices of modern society
including its not infrequent inhumanity
the technological attitude, which Heidegger reveals to be a significant expression of humanism
treats all beings, whether human or non-human
as manipulable objects for exploitation
nature becomes a mere resource for human use
humanist arrogance is held responsible for colonialism, genocide, and even the holocaust
the technological sophistication of the Nazi genocide is perhaps a striking example

this raises, of course, the question of Heidegger’s politics
why did he not see the Nazis as the culmination of this technological thinking?

Foucault
In the writing of Michel Foucault (1926-1984)
there is a radical critique of the subject
which furthers the anti-humanist tendency of post-existentialist thought
this critique of the subject shares with existentialism an abandonment of any absolutes

in The Order of Things Foucault sums up the anti-humanist critique
“As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end”
at the end of the book Foucault powerfully makes this point with a well-known line that the figure of man is destined to disappear “like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea”

the figure of man that is destined to be washed away by the sea
is, of course, that which was first drawn by Descartes
man as self-conscious subject
and later developed by Kant as the transcendental subject of all knowledge

Foucault called his early books “archaeologies”
and with these books he “invented a new practice of philosophy” (Patton, 537)
this new practice would be an attempt to engage in a “critical history of thought” (Patton, 537)

these works appear to be concerned with origins
with sifting through the past record of thought
however Foucault insisted that he was concerned with diagnosing the present
drawing upon Nietzsche’s genealogical approach to morality
Foucault sought to uncover the hidden or implicit knowledge
that underlay and made possible specific practices, institutions, and theories

in the essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”
we can see Foucault’s idea of philosophy as a genealogical or archaeological project
which is concerned with the recovery of origins
yet it will not be a recovery of an origin in a traditional sense of recovering an original essence

Foucault begins the essay with an interesting remark about the meticulous nature of genealogy
“Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and
confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (Foucault, 76).

Foucault is referring here to the idea of a palimpsest
palimpsest: 1. A parchment or other surface on which writing has been applied over earlier writing
which has been erased; 2. Something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form

genealogy in the traditional sense is conceived as a search for origins
but if it operates on a field that is a palimpsest as Foucault asserts
then it will be impossible to completely recover an origin
the original has been erased, and we are left with noting but traces

in the Preface to On the Genealogy of Morals
Nietzsche had criticized the genealogical approach to morality found in the book
The Origins of Morals Sensations by his one-time friend, Paul Rée

this book was wrongheaded, for following “the English tendency in describing the history of morality in
terms of linear development—in reducing its entire history and genesis to an exclusive concern for utility” (Foucault, 76).

In his preface Nietzsche suggests his aim is to point Rée in a better direction:

. . .in the direction of an actual history of morality, and to warn him in time against gazing around
haphazardly in the blue after the English fashion. For it must be obvious which color is a hundred
times more vital for a genealogist of morals than blue: namely gray, that is, what is documented,
what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short the entire long hieroglyphic
record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind! (GM Preface, 7)
what is meant here is that Rée had been looking into the sky, for a perspective above the actual history of morality
he had been looking, in the manner of traditional philosophers, for an absolute to ground morality upon—in this case in the manner of the Utilitarians

Foucault also makes the point that Rée had “assumed that words had kept their meaning” (Foucault, 76). Here he is making another point that Nietzsche had advanced regarding the metaphorical character of language (See “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”). The traditional view is that words have a fixed meaning. The notion that words have meaning only in relation to their place within the shifting context of the whole language undermines the idea of a fixed, stable meaning to words.

Foucault understands genealogy to be thus constrained by this problem of language and also the impossibility of recovering an origin as essence

“Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for “origins” (Foucault, 77).

thus, genealogy for Foucault will not be a search for an unchanging essence but instead will be the process of sifting through the history of thought in order to “trace the emergence of some of the concepts, institutions, and techniques of government which delineate the peculiar shape of modern European culture” (Patton, 537)

his books “include a history of madness, an account of the birth of clinical medicine at the end of the eighteenth century, an archaeology of the modern sciences of language, life, and labor, a genealogy of the modern form of punishment, and fragments of a history of sexuality” (Patton, 537)

this conception of philosophy as a critical history of thought is indebted to Kant’s notion of philosophy as critique which for Kant was the analysis of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge

but for Foucault there is no assumptions of universal a priori conditions for knowledge there are only particular historical a priori conditions for knowledge Foucault’s notion of critique “assumes only the fact that certain statements are made and that these function as knowledge within a given period” (Patton, 537) thus his aim in this archaeological project is simply to uncover and examine these particular conditions for what passed for knowledge during a given period

his work is part of a devastating postmodern critique of the Enlightenment of the notion that knowledge leads to the establishment of rational foundations for society and society’s institutions and that knowledge, in general, leads to progress for Foucault’s archaeologies suggest that knowledge always served particular interests following Nietzsche, Foucault develops the notion of knowledge as power it is not the “will to truth” that drives knowledge, but the “will to power”

thus Foucault’s works suggest that institutions such as asylums, hospitals, and prisons are society’s devices for exclusion
and that by surveying social attitudes in relation to these institutions one can examine the development and uses of power

Foucault identified his work as a development within a tradition that extends from Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and the poststructuralist theorists who do not “look for universal or timeless structures of knowledge, language, or moral action, but for ways of characterizing the present as a particular moment in history and for paths beyond it” (Patton, 538).

In his final interview he acknowledged his debt to Nietzsche:
“I am simply a Nietzschean, and try as far as possible, on a certain number of issues, to see with the help of Nietzsche’s texts” (Patton, 539)

in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche had suggested the greatest triumph of historical philosophy would be “a history of the genesis of thought” (Patton, 540) [*Human, All Too Human*, p. 18]

Foucault’s work was an attempt to contribute to this project

his work has had a considerable influence in the areas of social and political theory and philosophy
his theories of discourse analysis were highly influential in subsequent literary theory and criticism

**Derrida**

Born and raised in a Jewish family in Algeria, Derrida went to Paris to complete his secondary education before studying philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure. The philosophy of Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, was an important element in Derrida's training, and exercised a strong influence on his early writings. Other acknowledged influences are Nietzsche, Heidegger, Freud, and Levinas.

Derrida's early research attempted to formulate a phenomenological theory of literature. His first major publication (1962) was a French translation, accompanied by a long introductory essay, of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*.

Between 1967 and 1972 Derrida published his most influential works, an extensive series of commentaries on texts by key thinkers in the Western tradition, in which he developed the approach to texts which became known as **deconstruction**. A particular concern of Derrida's is with the relationship between philosophy and language.

Many of his essays examine philosophical theories of language, demonstrating, by close attention to the letter of the text, the ways in which language outwits philosophers. To this end Derrida emphasizes aspects of language that philosophy has often neglected, such as ambiguity, indeterminacy, pun, and metaphor.

In the essay “The Ends of Man” we see Derrida response to Sartre and existentialism here he closely follows Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” and yet in the essay he attempts to show that even Heidegger does not overcome the tradition of Western metaphysics Heidegger sought to overcome and thus the humanism that is embedded in that tradition

this essay provides a good example of Derrida’s approach to reading texts in this case, it is Heidegger’s text both *Being and Time* and then the “Letter on Humanism” which is deconstructed
“The Ends of Man” was a lecture Derrida delivered in New York in October 1968 at an international colloquium
the theme of the colloquium was “Philosophy and Anthropology”

“Anthropology,” of course, is “the study of humankind, the study of societies and cultures and human origins”
the term is derived from the Greek Anthropos (human being)

the historical and political context of the lecture is worth recalling
especially as Derrida begins the preamble to his essay by saying that “Every philosophical colloquium necessarily has a political significance” (The Ends of Man, 111).

At the end of the preamble Derrida recounts that the essay was written in April of that year
that, of course, as Derrida mentions, was month of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
and the opening of Vietnam peace talks in Paris
and set to type during the tumultuous month of May
that month of the student uprising
when the “universitities of Paris were invaded by the forces of order” (The Ends of Man, 114).

For this conference Derrida had been asked to give an account of contemporary French thought
more specifically, to explain “Where is France, as concerns man?” (The Ends of Man, 114).
this question was obviously a significant one
as it was well known that the question of man, the problem of humanism
was central to contemporary French thought
especially since Sartre’s 1946 essay “Existentialism is a Humanism”
and then Heidegger’s rejection of humanism in the “Letter on Humanism”

the problem of humanism was thus crucial in the development of French thought after Sartre
it was this issue that marked the surpassing of Existentialism in contemporary French philosophy

Derrida prefaces his preamble with three quotations
the first from Kant’s Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals:
“Now, I say, man and, in general, every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as
a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. In all his actions, whether they are directed to
himself or to other rational beings, he must always be regarded at the same time as an end . . .”

here Kant’s famous articulation of the essence of man as an end—that rational being that exists
only as an end and not as a means

the second is from Sartre’s Being and Nothingness
“Ontology . . . has merely enabled us to determine the ultimate ends of human reality, its
fundamental possibilities, and the value which haunts it.”

this citation shows the extent to which Sartre’s thought is still embedded in that tradition which
endeavors to determine the ultimate ends of human existence

finally, the third from Foucault’s The Order of Things:
“As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one
perhaps nearing its end.”
this citation perhaps sums up where France is regarding humanism, the question of man

thus in three citations three different senses of the “Ends of Man”:
1) man as an end in itself
2) the ultimate ends of man, the ultimate purpose, the telos of man
3) the end of the concept of man (that has developed in modern philosophy—and which, of course, is intimately connected with the development of democracy)

returning now to the preamble Derrida says that the reason every philosophical colloquium has a political significance is not due only
“to that which has always linked the essence of the philosophical to the essence of the political” (The Ends of Man, 111).
and what is it, by the way, that has always linked the essence of the philosophical (at least Western Philosophy) to the essence of the political?
the problem of democracy perhaps?

So why else does every philosophical colloquium have a political significance?

In the rest of the preamble Derrida examines the presuppositions behind the very idea of an international philosophical colloquium
there is first of all the very idea of national philosophical identities
there is also the very notion of the universality of philosophical discourse
that which would make possible some communication between different philosophical identities

the very notion of the universality of philosophical discourse Derrida suggests is less a fact than a project
this idea of a universal discourse is a central presumption of the project of the Enlightenment
part of the aim of international colloquia are to surmount or erase the differences in national philosophical identities

what Derrida is setting up here is the point that the very notion of an international philosophical colloquium rests upon an assumption that underlies the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy

there are, Derrida reminds us, some “societies, languages, cultures, and political or national organizations with which no exchange in the form of an international philosophical colloquium is possible” (The Ends of Man, 112).
in some cases this is because such exchange is prohibited
no doubt Derrida has in mind authoritarian or totalitarian regimes
this exclusion takes place “within the occidental orb of metaphysics or philosophy”
this prohibition (of cross-cultural dialogue) takes place within western metaphysics
it is “formulated in political concepts drawn from the metaphysical reserve” (The Ends of Man, 112).

But there are also places where such a philosophical colloquium would simply have no meaning
Derrida is suggesting that there are some places that do not share this metaphysical tradition
and this difference is what Derrida wants to emphasize
is especially relevant at a philosophical colloquium which has adopted anthropos,
the discourse on man as its chosen them
for such a difference makes questionable the whole assumption of the universality of man
Derrida is thus suggesting that the very notion of this international philosophical colloquium rests upon the humanist assumptions that contemporary French thought has come to question.

Derrida then turns to focus upon the connections between the very possibility of an international colloquium and democracy, with the very form of democracy.

Two implications of this connection between the very possibility of an international philosophical colloquium and democracy follow:

1) The form of democracy requires that a national philosophical identity accommodate nonidentity or, in other words, it must respect diversity.
2) The individual philosophers must not be required to assume the official policies of their countries.

Derrida stresses that his hesitation at appearing at the colloquium was overcome only with an assurance that he would be able to express his solidarity with those Americans who were resisting their own government’s actions in Vietnam.

He notes that the assurance he got indicates the organizers of the colloquium shared this opposition to the Vietnam War.

Derrida notes that one should not be naive about this apparent freedom to express opposition; the declaration of opposition is authorized only because it is not really a threat to the established order. Perhaps this is a point about the irrelevance of academic debate.

And then it is here at the end of the preamble that Derrida mentions the historical and political context of the writing of his lecture—the events of April and May.

As it is certainly relevant to the theme of “Philosophy and Anthropology” or the question of man and the problem of humanism.

Derrida goes on in the essay to show how the thought that dominated France after the war both Christian and atheist existentialism are presented as humanist.

He suggests, following Heidegger in the “Letter on Humanism,” how Sartre misread Being and Time.

What was unquestioned was the underlying assumption of the unity of man.

“And yet, despite this alleged neutralization of metaphysical presuppositions, it must be recognized that the unity of man is never examined in and of itself. Not only is existentialism a humanism, but the ground and horizon of what Sartre then called his “phenomenological ontology” (the subtitle of Being and Nothingness) remains the unity of human-reality” (The Ends of Man, 115).

There is still within this philosophical anthropology, Derrida asserts, “an uninterrupted metaphysical familiarity with that which, so naturally, links the we of the philosophers to ‘we men,’ to the we in the horizon of humanity. . . . the history of the concept of man is never examined. Everything occurs as if the sign “man” had no origin, no historical, cultural, or linguistic limit” (The Ends of Man, 116).

In the remainder of the essay, Derrida goes on to show how metaphysical assumptions, and thus humanism still continues in the tradition leading up to and including Heidegger.
as he puts it:
“What is the relève of man in the thought of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger?” (The Ends of Man, 117)
relève is a noun formed from the verb relever which means: to raise, lift up, to restore, recover, relieve
la relève is used in standard French to mean “the next generation”
it could be used in the sense of “the continuation of”
Derrida uses it as a translation for Aufhebung, which we remember is the key term for Hegel
remember that Hegel used it to describe that transition between movements of the dialectic
in that movement something is both cancelled and negated but also lifted up and recovered and thus
continued in the next movement
and we see this in movement between the three levels of existence Kierkegaard describes
whereas something of the aesthetic is continued over into the ethical
and something of the ethical over into the religious

thus, for Derrida, there is something of the humanism Heidegger attempts to distance himself from
carried over even in the new pathway of thinking beyond metaphysics that Heidegger attempts to think