

PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF THE CONCEPT OF HUMANISM IN THE WORKS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

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Abstract:

John Galsworthy, a Nobel Prize-winning English novelist and playwright, is renowned for his deep exploration of humanistic values in his literary works. His writings reflect a pragmatic approach to humanism, emphasizing social justice, moral responsibility, and the complexities of human relationships within a rapidly changing society. This paper examines the pragmatic aspects of humanism in Galsworthy's major works, particularly *The Forsyte Saga*, and analyzes how his humanistic ideals manifest in character development, social critique, and ethical dilemmas. By employing a close textual analysis and referencing critical scholarship, this study highlights Galsworthy's contribution to humanist literature and his enduring relevance in discussions of morality and social equity.

Key words: John Galsworthy, Humanism, Pragmatism, *The Forsyte Saga*, Social Justice, Moral Responsibility.

Humanism, as a philosophical and ethical stance, emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively. In literature, humanism often manifests through narratives that explore empathy, social justice, and moral integrity. John Galsworthy (1867–1933), a prominent figure in early 20th-century literature, integrated humanistic ideals into his works with a pragmatic approach, addressing real-world issues such as class disparity, legal injustice, and personal ethics.

Galsworthy's humanism is not merely theoretical but is deeply rooted in practical concerns, making his works resonate with readers across generations. This paper explores how Galsworthy's humanism operates pragmatically in his fiction, focusing on *The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921) as a primary case study while also referencing his plays and other novels.

Pragmatic humanism, as conceptualized by scholars such as Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum, refers to the application of humanistic values in real-life contexts, emphasizing problem-solving and ethical action over abstract idealism (Rorty, 1989; Nussbaum, 1997). Galsworthy's works align with this framework, as his characters often grapple with moral choices that have tangible social consequences.

In her 2024 study, Xamzaevna explores the linguocultural characteristics of the concept of "Insonparvarlik" (Humanism) within an Uzbek context, highlighting how language and culture shape the pragmatic understanding of humanistic values. The article, published in *Miasto Przyszłości*, argues that humanism is not a universal, static ideal but is instead interpreted and expressed differently across linguistic and cultural frameworks. Xamzaevna emphasizes the pragmatic function of humanistic discourse—how it is used in real-life communication to convey empathy, social responsibility, and ethical behavior within specific cultural norms. By analyzing linguistic expressions and cultural narratives, the study demonstrates that humanism operates as a dynamic, context-dependent concept, influencing interpersonal interactions, moral reasoning, and collective identity. This aligns with broader pragmatic theories that view meaning as constructed through social practice rather than existing in isolation (Xamzaevna, 2024). The research contributes to cross-cultural discussions on humanism by illustrating how pragmatics—language in use—mediates its interpretation and application in different societies.

Unlike utopian humanists, Galsworthy presents humanism as a struggle - one that requires compromise, resilience, and sometimes painful self-awareness. His narratives do not offer easy resolutions but instead highlight the complexities of human nature and societal structures.

The Forsyte Saga, Galsworthy's magnum opus, critiques the materialistic values of the upper-middle-class Forsyte family. Soames Forsyte, the central antagonist, embodies possessive individualism, treating relationships as property (Gindin, 1987). In contrast, characters like Irene and Young Jolyon represent humanistic resistance, valuing emotional authenticity over social conformity.

Galsworthy's pragmatic humanism is evident in his nuanced portrayal of these conflicts. He does not idealize his humanist characters; instead, he shows their struggles and imperfections. For instance, Irene's pursuit of personal freedom comes at a high emotional cost, illustrating the real-world challenges of upholding humanist principles.

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Galsworthy, trained as a barrister, frequently addressed legal injustices in his works. In *Justice* (1910), a play that influenced prison reform, he critiques the dehumanizing effects of the penal system (Barker, 1963). Similarly, in *The Forsyte Saga*, the divorce laws of Victorian England are scrutinized for their disregard for women's autonomy.

His humanism is pragmatic in that he advocates for systemic change rather than mere moral condemnation. By exposing institutional flaws, Galsworthy pushes readers to consider actionable reforms—a hallmark of pragmatic humanist thought.

Galsworthy's characters often undergo moral awakenings, reflecting his belief in personal responsibility. In *The Man of Property* (1906), Old Jolyon's gradual rejection of Forsyte values in favor of compassion demonstrates this evolution (O'Hara, 1991).

This aligns with the pragmatic humanist view that ethical growth arises from lived experience rather than abstract principles. Galsworthy's narratives suggest that true humanism requires active empathy—a willingness to engage with others' suffering and act upon it.

Comparing Galsworthy with contemporaries like H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw reveals distinct approaches to humanism. While Shaw's humanism was more polemical and Wells' more utopian, Galsworthy's was grounded in psychological realism and social critique (Dupre, 1976).

His focus on individual moral dilemmas, rather than sweeping ideological solutions, underscores his pragmatic orientation. This approach makes his humanism more accessible and relatable, as it acknowledges the constraints of real-world circumstances.

John Galsworthy's works present humanism not as an abstract ideal but as a practical ethos requiring courage, empathy, and societal engagement. Through *The Forsyte Saga* and his plays, he critiques materialism, advocates for legal reform, and explores the complexities of moral responsibility. His pragmatic humanism remains relevant today, offering insights into how literature can inspire ethical reflection and social change.

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