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HUMANISM FOR IDEAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Humanism is a philosophy, world view, or life stance based on naturalism-the conviction that the universe or nature is all that exists or is real. Humanism serves, for many humanists, some of the psychological and social functions of a religion, but without belief in deities, transcendental entities, miracles, life after death, and the supernatural. Humanists seek to understand the universe by using science and its methods of critical inquiry-logical reasoning, empirical evidence, and skeptical evaluation of conjectures and conclusions-to obtain reliable knowledge. Humanists affirm that humans have the freedom to give meaning, value, and purpose to their lives by their own independent thought, free inquiry, and responsible, creative activity. Humanists stand for the building of a more humane, just, compassionate, and democratic society using a pragmatic ethics based on human reason, experience, and reliable knowledge-an ethics that judges the consequences of human actions by the well-being of all life on Earth.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity. As humanists we base our morality on the value of each and every human being. From this it is no great leap to our commitment to human rights – including the right of others to disagree with us. So we support democratic forms of government, where everyone has the right to participate and the power of the majority to pursue its interests against the wishes of minorities is limited by respect for human rights and individual freedom. Humanists UK supports the idea of an 'open society' – one in which individual liberty, including freedom of belief and speech, is reinforced by a deliberate policy on the part of government and all official bodies of disinterested impartiality towards the many beliefs within society so long as they confirm to agreed minimum conventions.

So, while we seek to promote the humanist life stance as an alternative to (among others) religious beliefs, we do not seek any privilege in doing so but rely on the persuasiveness of our arguments and the attractiveness of our position. Correspondingly, we recognise and respect the deep commitment of other people to religious and other non-humanist views, but we reject any claims they may make to privileged positions by virtue of their beliefs.

The 'open society' is our ideal, but the present state of affairs is very different. We do not seek to restrict anyone's right to believe in religion, but we do not see why religion should have powerful privileges written into the law and customs of the land.

Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism, empiricism) over established doctrine or faith (fideism). The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated, according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Generally, however, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. In modern times, humanist movements are typically aligned with secularism, and today "Humanism" typically refers to a non-theistic life stance centred on human agency, and looking to science instead of religious dogma in order to understand the world.

1. Background

The word "Humanism" is ultimately derived from the Latin concept humanitas , and, like most other words ending in -ism, entered English in the nineteenth century. However, historians agree that the concept predates the label invented to describe it, encompassing the various meanings ascribed to humanitas, which included both benevolence toward one's fellow humans and the values imparted by bonae litterae or humane learning. Those who have spoken Latin and have used the language correctly do not give to the word humanitas the meaning which it is commonly thought to have, namely, what the Greeks call φιλανθρωπία (philanthropy), signifying a kind of friendly spirit and good feeling towards all men without distinction; but they gave to humanitas the force of the Greek παιδεία (paideia); that is, what we call eruditionem institution emque in bonas artes, or "education and training in the liberal arts [literally 'good arts']". Those who earnestly desire and seek after these are most highly humanized. For the desire to pursue of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it, has been granted to humanity alone of all the animals, and for that reason it is termed humanitas, or "humanity".

2. History



An ideal society as conceived by Renaissance humanist, Saint Thomas More in his book Utopia("Nowhere").

In 1808 Bavarian educational commissioner Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer coined the term Humanism us to describe the new classical curriculum he planned to offer in German secondary schools, and by 1836 the word "humanism" had been absorbed into the English language in this sense. The coinage gained universal acceptance in 1856, when German historian and philologist Georg Voigt used humanism to describe Renaissance humanism, the movement that flourished in the Italian Renaissance to revive classical learning, a use which won wide acceptance among historians in many nations, especially Italy.

But in the mid-18th century, during the French Enlightenment, a more ideological use of the term had come into use. In 1765, the

author of an anonymous article in a French Enlightenment periodical spoke of "The general love of humanity ... a virtue hitherto quite nameless among us, and which we will venture to call 'humanism', for the time has come to create a word for such a beautiful and necessary thing". The latter part of the 18th and the early 19th centuries saw the creation of numerous grass-roots "philanthropic" and benevolent societies dedicated to human betterment and the spreading of knowledge. After the French Revolution, the idea that human virtue could be created by human reason alone independently from traditional religious institutions, attributed by opponents of the Revolution to Enlightenment philosophes such as Rousseau, was violently attacked by influential religious and political conservatives, such as Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, as a deification or idolatry of humanity. Humanism began to acquire a negative sense. The Oxford English Dictionary records the use of the word "humanism" by an English clergyman in 1812 to indicate those who believe in the "mere humanity" of Christ, i.e., Unitarians and Deists. In this polarised atmosphere, in which established ecclesiastical bodies tended to circle the wagons and reflexively oppose political and social reforms like extending the franchise, universal schooling, and the like, liberal reformers and radicals embraced the idea of Humanism as an alternative religion of humanity. The anarchist Proudhon used the word "humanism" to describe a "culte, déification de l 'humanité" and Ernest Renan in L'avenir de la science: pensées de 1848 states: "It is my deep conviction that pure humanism will be the religion of the future, that is, the cult of all that pertains to humanity—all of life, sanctified and raised to the level of a moral value".

3. Types

3.1 Renaissance

Main article: Renaissance humanism

Renaissance humanism was an activity of cultural and educational reform engaged in by civic and ecclesiastical chancellors, book collectors, educators, and writers, who by the late fifteenth century began to be referred to as umanisti – "humanists". It developed during the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and was a response to the challenge of scholastic university education, which was then dominated by Aristotelian philosophy and logic.

3.2 Secular

Main article: Secular humanism

Secular humanism is a comprehensive life stance or world view which embraces human reason, metaphysical naturalism, altruistic morality and distributive justice, and consciously rejects supernatural claims, theistic faith and religiosity, pseudoscience, and superstition. It is sometimes referred to as Humanism (with a capital H and no qualifying adjective). The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is the world union of 117 Humanist, rationalist, irreligious, atheistic, Bright, secular, Ethical Culture, and free thought organisations in 38 countries. The "Happy Human" is the official symbol of the IHEU as well as being regarded as a universally recognised symbol for secular humanism. According to the IHEU's by law 5.1

3.3 Religious

Main article: Religious humanism

Religious humanism is an integration of humanist ethical philosophy with religious rituals and beliefs that centre on human needs, interests, and abilities. Though practitioners of religious humanism did not officially organise under the name of "humanism" until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, non-theistic religions paired with human centred ethical philosophy have a long history. The Cult of Reason (French: Culte de la Raison) was a religion based on deism devised during the French Revolution by Jacques Hébert, Pierre Gaspard Chaumette and their supporters. In 1793 during the French Revolution, the cathedral Notre Dame de Paris was turned into a "Temple to Reason" and for a time Lady Liberty replaced the Virgin Mary on several altars. In the 1850s, Auguste Comte, the Father of Sociology, founded Positivism, a "religion of humanity". The movement's founder, Felix Adler, a former member of the Free Religious Association, conceived of Ethical Culture as a new religion that would retain the ethical message at the heart of all religions. Ethical Culture was religious in the sense of playing a defining role in people's lives and addressing issues of ultimate concern.

4. Polemics

Polemics about humanism have sometimes assumed paradoxical twists and turns. Early 20th century critics such as Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, and T. S. Eliot considered humanism to be sentimental "slop" (Hulme) or "an old bitch gone in the teeth" (Pound)and wanted to go back to a more manly, authoritarian society such as (they believed) existed in the Middle Ages. Postmodern critics who are self-described anti-humanists, such as Jean François Lyotard and Michel Foucault, have asserted that humanism posits an overarching and excessively abstract notion of humanity or universal human nature, which can then be used as a pretext for imperialism and domination of those deemed somehow less than human. "Humanism fabricates the human as much as it fabricates the nonhuman animal", suggests Timothy Laurie, turning the human into what he calls "a placeholder for a range of attributes that have been considered most virtuous among humans (e.g. rationality, altruism), rather than most commonplace (e.g. hunger, anger)".

5. Humanistic psychology

Main article: Humanistic psychology

Humanistic psychology is a psychological perspective which rose to prominence in the mid-20th century in response to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and B.F. Skinner's Behaviorism. The approach emphasizes an individual's inherent drive towards self-actualization and creativity. Psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow introduced a positive, humanistic psychology in response to what they viewed as the overly pessimistic view of psychoanalysis in the early 1960s. Other sources include the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology.

The Ideal of Humanitas

The history of the term humanism is complex but enlightening. It was first employed (as humanismus) by 19th-century German scholars to designate the Renaissance emphasis on classical studies in education. These studies were pursued and endorsed by educators known, as early as the late 15th century, as umanisti: that is, professors or students of classical literature. The word umanisti derives from the studia humanitatis, a course of classical studies that, in the early 15th century, consisted of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral philosophy. The studia humanitatis were held to be the equivalent of the Greek paideia. Their name was itself based on the Latin humanitas, an educational and political ideal that was the intellectual basis of the entire movement. Renaissance humanism defined itself as an aspiration toward this ideal of virtue and wisdom.

Humanitas meant the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent. The term thus implied not only such qualities as are associated with the modern word humanity--understanding, benevolence, compassion, mercy--but also such more aggressive characteristics as fortitude, judgment, prudence, eloquence, and even love of honour. Consequently the possessor of humanitas could not be merely a sedentary and isolated philosopher or man of letters but was of necessity a participant in active life. Just as action without insight was held to be aimless and barbaric, insight without action was rejected as barren and imperfect. Humanitas called for a fine balance of action and contemplation, a balance born not of compromise but of complementarity. The goal of such fulfilled and balanced virtue was political in the broadest sense of the word. The purview of Renaissance humanism included not only the education of the young but also the guidance of adults (including rulers) via philosophical poetry and strategic rhetoric. It included not only realistic social criticism but also utopian hypotheses, not only painstaking reassessments of history but also bold reshapings of the future. In short, humanism called for the comprehensive reform of

culture, the transfiguration of what humanists termed the passive and ignorant society of the "dark" ages into a new order that would reflect and encourage the grandest human potentialities.

The Roots of Humanism

The wellspring of humanitas was classical literature. Greek and Roman thought, available in a flood of rediscovered or newly translated manuscripts, provided humanism with much of its basic structure and method. Classical philosophy, rhetoric, and history were seen as models of proper method--efforts to come to terms, systematically and without preconceptions of any kind, with perceived experience. Classical virtue was not an abstract essence but a quality that could be tested in the forum or on the battlefield. Humanism looked forward to a rebirth of a lost human spirit and wisdom. Victorian Humanism It is particularly from the earlier humanism's spirit of liberating men (and women) from the strictures of religious orthodoxy and narrow ideologies that Victorian humanism takes its tone and direction. The classical ideals of virtue and wisdom are preserved but are united with the passion for progress that came to dominate much Victorian thinking. Victorian humanism is, simultaneously, a moral, a scientific, and a social movement, aspiring, precisely, to a deepening of the human spirits search for its own nature.

CONCLUSION

Humanism is a philosophy that believes in human effort and ingenuity rather than religion based on divine intervention. Humanists think that this life and this world is all we have. Like everything else that exists we are the product of natural processes. There are several types of humanism which have been conceptualized by thinkers over the ages, like Renaissance Humanism, Christian Humanism, Naturalistic Humanism, Marxian Humanism, Secular Humanism, New Humanism etc. Broadly speaking, humanism can be hitched to two poles: religious and secular. A debate has always raged around whether it is the philosophy or the religion that forms the core of humanism.

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