Humanism

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Humanism

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• Generally, however, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress.

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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 and empiricism) over acceptance of dogma or superstition. The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. The term was coined by theologian Friedrich Niethammer at the beginning of the 19th century to refer to a system of education based on the study of classical literature ("classical humanism"). Generally, however, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. It views humans as solely responsible for the promotion and development of individuals and emphasizes a concern for man in relation to the world.

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Background

• In the Anglophone world, such modern, organized forms of humanism, which are rooted in the 18th-century Enlightenment, have to a considerable extent more or less detached themselves from the historic connection of humanism with classical learning and the liberal arts.

• The word "humanism" is ultimately derived from the Latin concept humanitas.

The word "humanism" is ultimately derived from the Latin concept humanitas. It 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 (literally "good letters").

In the second century AD, a Latin grammarian, Aulus Gellius (c. 125 – c. 180), complained:

Gellius says that in his day humanitas is commonly used as a synonym for philanthropy – or kindness and benevolence toward one's fellow human beings. Gellius maintains that this common usage is wrong, and that model writers of Latin, such as Cicero and others, used the word only to mean what we might call "humane" or "polite" learning, or the Greek equivalent Paideia. Yet in seeking to restrict the meaning of humanitas to literary education this way, Gellius was not advocating a retreat from political engagement into some ivory tower, though it might look like that to us. He himself was involved in public affairs. According to legal historian Richard Bauman, Gellius was a judge as well as a grammarian and was an active participant the great contemporary debate on harsh punishments that accompanied the legal reforms of Antoninus Pius (one these reforms, for example, was that a prisoner was not to be treated as guilty before being tried). "By assigning pride of place to Paideia in his comment on the etymology of humanitas, Gellius implies that the trained mind is best equipped to handle the problems troubling society."

Gellius's writings fell into obscurity during the Middle Ages, but during the Italian Renaissance, Gellius became a favorite author. Teachers and scholars of Greek and Latin grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and poetry were called and called themselves "humanists". Modern scholars, however, point out that Cicero (106 – 43 BCE), who was most responsible for defining and popularizing the term humanitas, in fact frequently used the word in both senses, as did his near contemporaries. For Cicero, a lawyer, what most distinguished humans from brutes was speech, which, allied to reason, could (and should) enable them to settle disputes and live together in concord and harmony under the rule of law. Thus humanitas included two meanings from the outset and these continue in the modern derivative, humanism, which even today can refer to both humanitarian benevolence and to a method of study and debate involving an accepted group of authors and a careful and accurate use of language.

During the French Revolution, and soon after, in Germany (by the Left Hegelians), humanism began to refer to an ethical philosophy centered on humankind, without attention to the transcendent or supernatural. The designation Religious Humanism refers to organized groups that sprang up during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is similar to Protestantism, although centered on human needs, interests, and abilities rather than the supernatural. In the Anglophone world, such modern, organized forms of humanism, which are rooted in the 18th-century Enlightenment, have to a considerable extent more or less detached themselves from the historic connection of humanism with classical learning and the liberal arts.

The first Humanist Manifesto was issued by a conference held at the University of Chicago in 1933. Signatories included the philosopher John Dewey, but the majority were ministers (chiefly Unitarian) and theologians. They identified humanism as an ideology that espouses reason, ethics, and social and economic justice, and they called for science to replace dogma and the supernatural as the basis of morality and decision-making.

An ideal society as conceived by Renaissance humanist Saint Thomas More in his book Utopia

History

• Humanism began to acquire a negative 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.

In 1808 Bavarian educational commissioner Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer coined the term Humanismus 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 (some Christian, some not). 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" (as opposed to the divine nature) 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 (best known for declaring that "property is theft") used the word "humanism" to describe a "culte, déification de l’humanité" ("worship, deification of humanity") and Ernest Renan in L’avenir de la science: pensées de 1848 ("The Future of Knowledge: Thoughts on 1848") (1848–49), 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."

At about the same time, the word "humanism" as a philosophy centred on humankind (as opposed to institutionalised religion) was also being used in Germany by the Left Hegelians, Arnold Ruge, and Karl Marx, who were critical of the close involvement of the church in the German government. There has been a persistent confusion between the several uses of the terms: philanthropic humanists look to what they consider their antecedents in critical thinking and human-centered philosophy among the Greek philosophers and the great figures of Renaissance history; and scholarly humanists stress the linguistic and cultural disciplines needed to understand and interpret these philosophers and artists.

Predecessors

Ancient India

• Human-centered philosophy that rejected the supernatural may also be found circa 1500 BCE in the Lokayata system of Indian philosophy.

Human-centered philosophy that rejected the supernatural may also be found circa 1500 BCE in the Lokayata system of Indian philosophy. Nasadiya Sukta, a passage in the Rig Veda, contains one of the first recorded assertions of agnosticism. In the 6th century BCE, Gautama Buddha expressed, in Pali literature a skeptical attitude toward the supernatural:

Ancient China

• The philosophy of Confucius (551–479 BCE), which eventually became the basis of the state ideology of successive Chinese dynasties and nearby polities in East Asia, contains several humanistic traits, placing a high value on human life and discounting mysticism and superstition, including speculations on ghosts and an afterlife.

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In Chapter 10 of the Analects, an incident involving a fire in the stables is recounted: "The stables burned. The Master withdrew from court and asked, 'Was anybody hurt?' He did not inquire about the horses." This incident is interpreted to illustrate the priority that Confucius placed on human life over any economic losses associated with the fire. Later, in Chapter 11, a disciple, Ji Lu, asks Confucius on how to properly serve ghosts and spirits, and what the Master knows about death. Confucius replied, "If you do not know the proper way to serve people, what need is there to discuss how to serve ghosts? If you do not understand life, what is the point of understanding death?" In Chapter 15, the Analects gives the passive form of the Golden Rule ('the Silver Rule'). When asked for a single word to live one's life in accordance with, Confucius gives the reply, leniency (恕), elaborating, "Do not impose upon others that which you yourself would not desire."

Subsequent Confucian philosophers during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), including Mencius and Xunzi, likewise centered their philosophies on secular, humanistic concerns, like the nature of good governance and the role of education, rather than ideas founded on the state or folk religions of the time.

Ancient Greece

• Sixth-century BCE pre-Socratic Greek philosophers Thales of Miletus and Xenophanes of Colophon were the first in the region to attempt to explain the world in terms of human reason rather than myth and tradition, thus can be said to be the first Greek humanists.

• Anaxagoras brought philosophy and the spirit of rational inquiry from Ionia to Athens.

Sixth-century BCE pre-Socratic Greek philosophers Thales of Miletus and Xenophanes of Colophon were the first in the region to attempt to explain the world in terms of human reason rather than myth and tradition, thus can be said to be the first Greek humanists. Thales questioned the notion of anthropomorphic gods and Xenophanes refused to recognise the gods of his time and reserved the divine for the principle of unity in the universe. These Ionian Greeks were the first thinkers to assert that nature is available to be studied separately from the supernatural realm. Anaxagoras brought philosophy and the spirit of rational inquiry from Ionia to Athens. Pericles, the leader of Athens during the period of its greatest glory was an admirer of Anaxagoras. Other influential pre-Socratics or rational philosophers include Protagoras (like Anaxagoras a friend of Pericles), known for his famous dictum "man is the measure of all things" and Democritus, who proposed that matter was composed of atoms. Little of the written work of these early philosophers survives and they are known mainly from fragments and quotations in other writers, principally Plato and Aristotle. The historian Thucydides, noted for his scientific and rational approach to history, is also much admired by later humanists. In the 3rd century BCE, Epicurus became known for his concise phrasing of the problem of evil, lack of belief in the afterlife, and human-centred approaches to achieving eudaimonia. He was also the first Greek philosopher to admit women to his school as a rule.

Medieval Islam

• According to George Makdisi, certain aspects of Renaissance humanism has its roots in the medieval Islamic world, including the "art of dictation, called in Latin, ars dictaminis", and "the humanist attitude toward classical language".

Many medieval Muslim thinkers pursued humanistic, rational and scientific discourses in their search for knowledge, meaning and values. A wide range of Islamic writings on love, poetry, history and philosophical theology show that medieval Islamic thought was open to the humanistic ideas of individualism, occasional secularism, skepticism, and liberalism.

According to Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, another reason the Islamic world flourished during the Middle Ages was an early emphasis on freedom of speech, as summarised by al-Hashimi (a cousin of Caliph al-Ma'mun) in the following letter to one of the religious opponents he was attempting to convert through reason:

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The Icelandic Sagas

• Turville-Petre have identified a stream of humanistic philosophy in the Icelandic sagas.

Scholars including Jacob Grimm, J.R.R. Tolkien and E.O.G. Turville-Petre have identified a stream of humanistic philosophy in the Icelandic sagas. People described as goðlauss ("without gods") expressed not only a lack of faith in deities, but also a pragmatic belief in their own faculties of strength, reason and virtue and in social codes of honor independent of any supernatural agency.

In his Teutonic Mythology (1835), Grimm wrote:

In Myth and Religion of the North (1964), Turville-Petre argued that many of the strophes of the Gestaþáttr and Loddfáfnismál sections of the Havamal express goðlauss sentiments despite being poetically attributed to the god Odin. These strophes include numerous items of advice on good conduct and worldly wisdom.

Portrait of Petrarch painted in 1376

Coluccio Salutati, Chancellor of Florence and disciple of Petrarch (1331–1406)

Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), an early Renaissance humanist, book collector, and reformer of script, who served as papal secretary

Renaissance

• The 19th-century German historian Georg Voigt (1827–91) identified Petrarch as the first Renaissance humanist.

• Renaissance humanism was an intellectual movement in Europe of the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

• Contrary to a still widely held interpretation that originated in Voigt's celebrated contemporary, Jacob Burckhardt, and which was adopted wholeheartedly – especially by modern thinkers calling themselves "humanists" – most specialists today do not characterise Renaissance humanism as a philosophical movement, nor in any way as anti-Christian or even anti-clerical.

Renaissance humanism was an intellectual movement in Europe of the later Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. The 19th-century German historian Georg Voigt (1827–91) identified Petrarch as the first Renaissance humanist. Paul Johnson agrees that Petrarch was "the first to put into words the notion that the centuries between the fall of Rome and the present had been the age of Darkness". According to Petrarch, what was needed to remedy this situation was the careful study and imitation of the great classical authors. For Petrarch and Boccaccio, the greatest master was Cicero, whose prose became the model for both learned (Latin) and vernacular (Italian) prose.

The basic training of the humanist was to speak well and write (typically, in the form of a letter). One of Petrarch's followers, Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) was made chancellor of Florence, "whose interests he defended with his literary skill. The Visconti of Milan claimed that Salutati’s pen had done more damage than 'thirty squadrons of Florentine cavalry'".

Contrary to a still widely held interpretation that originated in Voigt's celebrated contemporary, Jacob Burckhardt, and which was adopted wholeheartedly – especially by modern thinkers calling themselves "humanists" – most specialists today do not characterise Renaissance humanism as a philosophical movement, nor in any way as anti-Christian or even anti-clerical. A modern historian has this to say:

The umanisti criticized what they considered the barbarous Latin of the universities, but the revival of the humanities largely did not conflict with the teaching of traditional university subjects, which went on as before.

Nor did the humanists view themselves as in conflict with Christianity. Some, like Salutati, were the Chancellors of Italian cities, but the majority (including Petrarch) were ordained as priests, and many worked as senior officials of the Papal court. Humanist Renaissance popes Nicholas V, Pius II, Sixtus IV, and Leo X wrote books and amassed huge libraries.

In the High Renaissance, in fact, there was a hope that more direct knowledge of the wisdom of antiquity, including the writings of the Church fathers, the earliest known Greek texts of the Christian Gospels, and in some cases even the Jewish Kabbalah, would initiate a harmonious new era of universal agreement. With this end in view, Renaissance Church authorities afforded humanists what in retrospect appears a remarkable degree of freedom of thought. One humanist, the Greek Orthodox Platonist Gemistus Pletho (1355–1452), based in Mystras, Greece (but in contact with humanists in Florence, Venice, and Rome) taught a Christianised version of pagan polytheism.

Portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam

Back to the sources

• Henceforth Renaissance humanism, particularly in the German North, became concerned with religion, while Italian and French humanism concentrated increasingly on scholarship and philology addressed to a narrow audience of specialists, studiously avoiding topics that might offend despotic rulers or which might be seen as corrosive of faith.

The humanists' close study of Latin literary texts soon enabled them to discern historical differences in the writing styles of different periods. By analogy with what they saw as decline of Latin, they applied the principle of ad fontes, or back to the sources, across broad areas of learning, seeking out manuscripts of Patristic literature as well as pagan authors. In 1439, while employed in Naples at the court of Alfonso V of Aragon (at the time engaged in a dispute with the Papal States) the humanist Lorenzo Valla used stylistic textual analysis, now called philology, to prove that the Donation of Constantine, which purported to confer temporal powers on the Pope of Rome, was an 8th-century forgery. For the next 70 years, however, neither Valla nor any of his contemporaries thought to apply the techniques of philology to other controversial manuscripts in this way. Instead, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks in 1453, which brought a flood of Greek Orthodox refugees to Italy, humanist scholars increasingly turned to the study of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, hoping to bridge the differences between the Greek and Roman Churches, and even between Christianity itself and the non-Christian world. The refugees brought with them Greek manuscripts, not only of Plato and Aristotle, but also of the Christian Gospels, previously unavailable in the Latin West.

After 1517, when the new invention of printing made these texts widely available, the Dutch humanist Erasmus, who had studied Greek at the Venetian printing house of Aldus Manutius, began a philological analysis of the Gospels in the spirit of Valla, comparing the Greek originals with their Latin translations with a view to correcting errors and discrepancies in the latter. Erasmus, along with the French humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, began issuing new translations, laying the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation. Henceforth Renaissance humanism, particularly in the German North, became concerned with religion, while Italian and French humanism concentrated increasingly on scholarship and philology addressed to a narrow audience of specialists, studiously avoiding topics that might offend despotic rulers or which might be seen as corrosive of faith. After the Reformation, critical examination of the Bible did not resume until the advent of the so-called Higher criticism of the 19th-century German Tübingen school.

Consequences

• Just as artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci – partaking of the zeitgeist though not himself a humanist – advocated study of human anatomy, nature, and weather to enrich Renaissance works of art, so Spanish-born humanist Juan Luis Vives (c. 1493–1540) advocated observation, craft, and practical techniques to improve the formal teaching of Aristotelian philosophy at the universities, helping to free them from the grip of Medieval Scholasticism.

• But Renaissance humanists, who considered themselves as restoring the glory and nobility of antiquity, had no interest in scientific innovation.

The ad fontes principle also had many applications. The re-discovery of ancient manuscripts brought a more profound and accurate knowledge of ancient philosophical schools such as Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism, whose Pagan wisdom the humanists, like the Church fathers of old, tended, at least initially, to consider as deriving from divine revelation and thus adaptable to a life of Christian virtue. The line from a drama of Terence, Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto (or with nil for nihil), meaning "I am a human being, I think nothing human alien to me", known since antiquity through the endorsement of Saint Augustine, gained renewed currency as epitomising the humanist attitude. The statement, in a play modeled or borrowed from a (now lost) Greek comedy by Menander, may have originated in a lighthearted vein – as a comic rationale for an old man's meddling – but it quickly became a proverb and throughout the ages was quoted with a deeper meaning, by Cicero and Saint Augustine, to name a few, and most notably by Seneca. Richard Bauman writes:

The words of the comic playwright P. Terentius Afer reverberated across the Roman world of the mid-2nd century BCE and beyond. Terence, an African and a former slave, was well placed to preach the message of universalism, of the essential unity of the human race, that had come down in philosophical form from the Greeks, but needed the pragmatic muscles of Rome in order to become a practical reality. The influence of Terence's felicitous phrase on Roman thinking about human rights can hardly be overestimated. Two hundred years later Seneca ended his seminal exposition of the unity of humankind with a clarion-call:

Better acquaintance with Greek and Roman technical writings also influenced the development of European science (see the history of science in the Renaissance). This was despite what A. C. Crombie (viewing the Renaissance in the 19th-century manner as a chapter in the heroic March of Progress) calls "a backwards-looking admiration for antiquity", in which Platonism stood in opposition to the Aristotelian concentration on the observable properties of the physical world. But Renaissance humanists, who considered themselves as restoring the glory and nobility of antiquity, had no interest in scientific innovation. However, by the mid-to-late 16th century, even the universities, though still dominated by Scholasticism, began to demand that Aristotle be read in accurate texts edited according to the principles of Renaissance philology, thus setting the stage for Galileo's quarrels with the outmoded habits of Scholasticism.

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It was in education that the humanists' program had the most lasting results, their curriculum and methods:

From Renaissance to modern humanism

• In the Renaissance to be secular meant simply to be in the world rather than in a monastery.

• Renaissance scholars associated with humanism were religious, but inveighed against the abuses of the Church, if not against the Church itself.

Renaissance scholars associated with humanism were religious, but inveighed against the abuses of the Church, if not against the Church itself.[citation needed] For them, the word "secular" carried no connotations of disbelief – that would come later, in the nineteenth century. In the Renaissance to be secular meant simply to be in the world rather than in a monastery. Petrarch frequently admitted that his brother Gherardo's life as a Carthusian monk was superior to his own (although Petrarch himself was in Minor Orders and was employed by the Church all his life). He hoped that he could do some good by winning earthly glory and praising virtue, inferior though that might be to a life devoted solely to prayer. By embracing a non-theistic philosophic base, however, the methods of the humanists, combined with their eloquence, would ultimately have a corrosive effect on established authority.

For some, this meant turning back to the Bible as the source of authority instead of the Catholic Church, for others it was a split from theism altogether. This was the main divisive line between the Reformation and the Renaissance, which dealt with the same basic problems, supported the same science based on reason and empirical research, but had a different set of presuppositions (theistic versus naturalistic).

Nineteenth and twentieth centuries

• It then presented 15 theses of humanism as foundational principles for this new religion.

• Potter was a minister from the Unitarian tradition and in 1930 he and his wife, Clara Cook Potter, published Humanism: A New Religion.

• In 2008, Ethical Culture Leaders wrote: "Today, the historic identification, Ethical Culture, and the modern description, Ethical Humanism, are used interchangeably."

The phrase the "religion of humanity" is sometimes attributed to American Founding Father Thomas Paine, though as yet unattested in his surviving writings. According to Tony Davies:

Davies identifies Paine's The Age of Reason as "the link between the two major narratives of what Jean-François Lyotard calls the narrative of legitimation": the rationalism of the 18th-century Philosophes and the radical, historically based German 19th-century Biblical criticism of the Hegelians David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach. "The first is political, largely French in inspiration, and projects 'humanity as the hero of liberty'. The second is philosophical, German, seeks the totality and autonomy of knowledge, and stresses understanding rather than freedom as the key to human fulfilment and emancipation. The two themes converged and competed in complex ways in the 19th century and beyond, and between them set the boundaries of its various humanisms. Homo homini deus est ("The human being is a god to humanity" or "god is nothing [other than] the human being to himself"), Feuerbach had written.

Victorian novelist Mary Ann Evans, known to the world as George Eliot, translated Strauss's Das Leben Jesu ("The Life of Jesus", 1846) and Ludwig Feuerbach's Das Wesen Christianismus ("The Essence of Christianity"). She wrote to a friend:

Eliot and her circle, who included her companion George Henry Lewes (the biographer of Goethe) and the abolitionist and social theorist Harriet Martineau, were much influenced by the positivism of Auguste Comte, whom Martineau had translated. Comte had proposed an atheistic culte founded on human principles – a secular Religion of Humanity (which worshiped the dead, since most humans who have ever lived are dead), complete with holidays and liturgy, modeled on the rituals of what was seen as a discredited and dilapidated Catholicism. Although Comte's English followers, like Eliot and Martineau, for the most part rejected the full gloomy panoply of his system, they liked the idea of a religion of humanity. Comte's austere vision of the universe, his injunction to "vivre pour altrui" ("live for others", from which comes the word "altruism"), and his idealisation of women inform the works of Victorian novelists and poets from George Eliot and Matthew Arnold to Thomas Hardy.

The British Humanistic Religious Association was formed as one of the earliest forerunners of contemporary chartered Humanist organisations in 1853 in London. This early group was democratically organised, with male and female members participating in the election of the leadership, and promoted knowledge of the sciences, philosophy, and the arts.

In February 1877, the word was used pejoratively, apparently for the first time in America, to describe Felix Adler. Adler, however, did not embrace the term, and instead coined the name "Ethical Culture" for his new movement  – a movement which still exists in the now Humanist-affiliated New York Society for Ethical Culture. In 2008, Ethical Culture Leaders wrote: "Today, the historic identification, Ethical Culture, and the modern description, Ethical Humanism, are used interchangeably."

Active in the early 1920s, F.C.S. Schiller labelled his work "humanism" but for Schiller the term referred to the pragmatist philosophy he shared with William James. In 1929, Charles Francis Potter founded the First Humanist Society of New York whose advisory board included Julian Huxley, John Dewey, Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann. Potter was a minister from the Unitarian tradition and in 1930 he and his wife, Clara Cook Potter, published Humanism: A New Religion. Throughout the 1930s, Potter was an advocate of such liberal causes as, women’s rights, access to birth control, "civil divorce laws", and an end to capital punishment.

Raymond B. Bragg, the associate editor of The New Humanist, sought to consolidate the input of Leon Milton Birkhead, Charles Francis Potter, and several members of the Western Unitarian Conference. Bragg asked Roy Wood Sellars to draft a document based on this information which resulted in the publication of the Humanist Manifesto in 1933. Potter's book and the Manifesto became the cornerstones of modern humanism, the latter declaring a new religion by saying, "any religion that can hope to be a synthesising and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present." It then presented 15 theses of humanism as foundational principles for this new religion.

In 1941, the American Humanist Association was organised. Noted members of The AHA included Isaac Asimov, who was the president from 1985 until his death in 1992, and writer Kurt Vonnegut, who followed as honorary president until his death in 2007. Gore Vidal became honorary president in 2009. Robert Buckman was the head of the association in Canada, and is now an honorary president.[citation needed]

After World War II, three prominent Humanists became the first directors of major divisions of the United Nations: Julian Huxley of UNESCO, Brock Chisholm of the World Health Organization, and John Boyd-Orr of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

In 2004, American Humanist Association, along with other groups representing agnostics, atheists, and other freethinkers, joined to create the Secular Coalition for America which advocates in Washington, D.C., for separation of church and state and nationally for the greater acceptance of nontheistic Americans. The Executive Director of Secular Coalition for America is Larry T. Decker.

Types

Scholarly tradition

Renaissance humanists

• There were important centres of humanism at Florence, Naples, Rome, Venice, Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino.

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"Renaissance humanism" is the name later given to a tradition 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. Scholasticism focused on preparing men to be doctors, lawyers or professional theologians, and was taught from approved textbooks in logic, natural philosophy, medicine, law and theology. There were important centres of humanism at Florence, Naples, Rome, Venice, Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino.

Humanists reacted against this utilitarian approach and the narrow pedantry associated with it. They sought to create a citizenry (frequently including women) able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity and thus capable of engaging the civic life of their communities and persuading others to virtuous and prudent actions. This was to be accomplished through the study of the studia humanitatis, today known as the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy. As a program to revive the cultural—and particularly the literary—legacy and moral philosophy of classical antiquity, Humanism was a pervasive cultural mode and not the program of a few isolated geniuses like Rabelais or Erasmus as is still sometimes popularly believed.

Non-theistic worldviews

Secular humanists

• It is sometimes referred to as Humanism (with a capital H and no qualifying adjective).

• The "Happy Human" is the official symbol of the IHEU as well as being regarded as a universally recognised symbol for secular humanism.

• The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is the world union of 117 Humanist, rationalist, irreligious, atheistic, Bright, secular, Ethical Culture, and freethought organisations in 38 countries.

Secular humanism is a comprehensive life stance or world view that 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 freethought 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 bylaw 5.1:

Religious humanists

• 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.

• "Religious humanists" are non-superstitious people who nevertheless see ethical humanism as their religion, and who seek to integrate (secular) humanist ethical philosophy with congregational rituals centred on human needs, interests, and abilities.

"Religious humanists" are non-superstitious people who nevertheless see ethical humanism as their religion, and who seek to integrate (secular) humanist ethical philosophy with congregational rituals centred 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. A unified Ethical Culture movement was first founded in 1876; its founder, Felix Adler, was a former member of the Free Religious Association and 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. Nowadays religious humanists in the United States are represented by organisations such as the American Ethical Union and will simply describe themselves as "ethical humanists" or "humanists". Secular humanists and religious humanists organise together as part of larger national and international groupings, and differentiate themselves primarily in their attitude to the promotion of humanist thinking.

Earlier attempts at inventing a secular religious tradition informed the Ethical Culture movement. 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, the cathedral Notre Dame de Paris was turned into a "Temple of 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". One of the earliest forerunners of contemporary chartered humanist organisations was the Humanistic Religious Association formed in 1853 in London. This early group was democratically organised, with male and female members participating in the election of the leadership and promoted knowledge of the sciences, philosophy, and the arts.

The distinction between so-called "ethical" humanists and "secular" humanists is most pronounced in the United States, although it is becoming less so over time. The philosophical distinction is not reflected at all in Canada, Latin America, Africa, or Asia, or most of Europe. In the UK, where the humanist movement was strongly influenced by Americans in the 19th century, the leading "ethical societies" and "ethical churches" evolved into secular humanist charities (e.g. the British Ethical Union became the British Humanist Association and later Humanists UK). In Scandinavian countries, "human-etikcode: nno promoted to code: nn " or "humanetikkcode: nno promoted to code: nn " (roughly synonymous with ethical humanism) is a popular strand within humanism, originating from the works of Danish philosopher Harald Høffding. The Norwegian Humanist Association, Human-Etisk Forbund (HEF, literally "Human-Ethical League"), belongs to this tendency. Over time, the emphasis on human-etiskcode: nno promoted to code: nn has become less pronounced, and today HEF promotes both humanismecode: nno promoted to code: nn (secular humanism) and human-etiskcode: nno promoted to code: nn . In Sweden, the main Swedish humanist group Humanisterna ("Humanists") began as a "human-ethical association" like the Norwegian humanists before adopting the more prevalent secular humanist model popular in most of Europe. Today the distinction in Europe is mostly superficial.

Criticism

• In his book, Humanism (1997), Tony Davies calls these critics "humanist anti-humanists".

• Polemics about humanism have sometimes assumed paradoxical twists and turns.

• Such a reading of Heidegger's thought is itself deeply controversial; Heidegger includes his own views and critique of Humanism in Letter On Humanism.

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)[citation needed] or "an old bitch gone in the teeth" (Pound). 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)". Nevertheless, philosopher Kate Soper notes that by faulting humanism for falling short of its own benevolent ideals, anti-humanism thus frequently "secretes a humanist rhetoric".

In his book, Humanism (1997), Tony Davies calls these critics "humanist anti-humanists". Critics of antihumanism, most notably Jürgen Habermas, counter that while antihumanists may highlight humanism's failure to fulfil its emancipatory ideal, they do not offer an alternative emancipatory project of their own. Others, like the German philosopher Heidegger. considered themselves humanists on the model of the ancient Greeks but thought humanism applied only to the German "race" and specifically to the Nazis and thus, in Davies' words, were anti-humanist humanists. Such a reading of Heidegger's thought is itself deeply controversial; Heidegger includes his own views and critique of Humanism in Letter On Humanism. Davies acknowledges that, after the horrific experiences of the wars of the 20th century, "it should no longer be possible to formulate phrases like 'the destiny of man' or the 'triumph of human reason' without an instant consciousness of the folly and brutality they drag behind them". For "it is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of human reason". Yet, he continues, "it would be unwise to simply abandon the ground occupied by the historical humanisms. For one thing humanism remains on many occasions the only available alternative to bigotry and persecution. The freedom to speak and write, to organise and campaign in defence of individual or collective interests, to protest and disobey: all these can only be articulated in humanist terms."

Modern humanists, such as Corliss Lamont or Carl Sagan, hold that humanity must seek for truth through reason and the best observable evidence and endorse scientific skepticism and the scientific method. However, they stipulate that decisions about right and wrong must be based on the individual and common good, with no consideration given to metaphysical or supernatural beings. The idea is to engage with what is human. The ultimate goal is human flourishing; making life better for all humans, and as the most conscious species, also promoting concern for the welfare of other sentient beings and the planet as a whole. The focus is on doing good and living well in the here and now, and leaving the world a better place for those who come after. In 1925, the English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead cautioned: "The prophecy of Francis Bacon has now been fulfilled; and man, who at times dreamt of himself as a little lower than the angels, has submitted to become the servant and the minister of nature. It still remains to be seen whether the same actor can play both parts".

Humanistic psychology

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See also

Notes

References

External links

• Humanism.

• The Philosophy of Humanism by Corliss Lamont

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