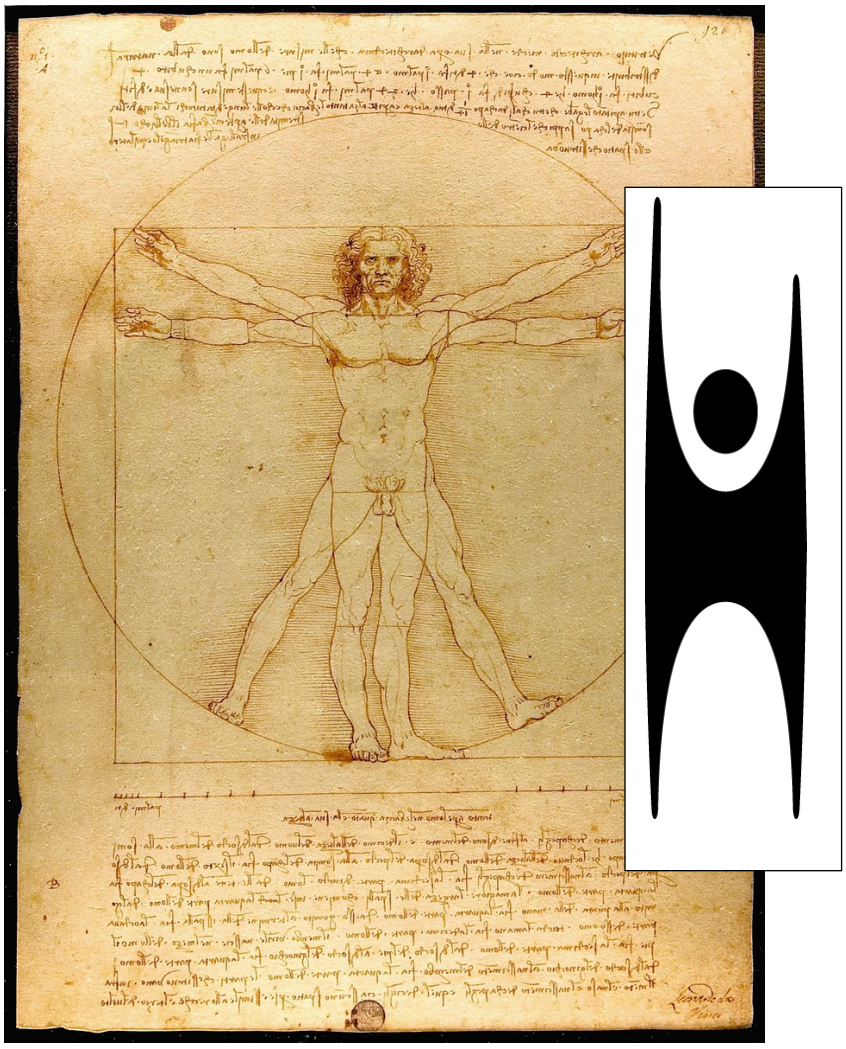
Rethinking Religion: Humanism



Vitruvian Man (Leonardo da Vinci, 1490)

Happy Human (BHA, 1965)

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Humanism?

According to the Humanists International global organisation, "*Humanism is a rational, non-religious approach to life*" and "*Humanists strive to lead fulfilling, meaningful and ethical lives, using reason and empathy to guide them*".[1] In contrast to the major religions, Humanism claims it does not have any dogma, doctrines or creeds in the traditional religious sense. It certainly does not have a founding prophet or teacher, and it does not have any special buildings (church, temple or meeting house) in which its followers congregate. However, humanism clearly does have important beliefs as evidenced by the Amsterdam Declaration issued by Humanists International (1952, 2002, 2022).[2] The Declaration is probably the nearest that humanism has come to a proclamation of its core beliefs, at least in the 20th and 21st centuries. So, humanism is included here (in a collection of essays about religion) because it is an important worldview, and arguably many aspects of it are in fact religious in nature.

However, there have been, and to some extent there still are, many different types of the humanism. Religious humanism and secular humanism are two well-known examples, but there are other types as will be described later. There are also different historical periods of humanism, "...the humanism of the Renaissance, of the scholars, poets and courtiers who first coined the phrase. There is the humanism of antiquity – of Plato, Aristotle, or the Stoics; there is the humanism of Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, or John Stuart Mill" (Falk and Farrer, 1989). Importantly, these historical humanisms are very different to the contemporary humanism (or humanisms) of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Lastly, although humanism is largely a product of Western Europe, different forms of humanism are also found across the world from the Americas to East Asia, in Africa and in the Middle East (Pinn, 2021). This enormous diversity presents a problem when trying to provide a succinct overview of the subject, but here's my attempt...

1.2 Definitions

The seemingly authoritative Amsterdam Declaration is comparatively recent and obscures humanism's complicated history including about the word itself. The earliest dictionary definitions related to humanism actually recognised only the person, the *humanist*. For example, John Florio's Italian-English dictionary of 1611 defined *humanista* as "a humanist or professor of humanitie". In Samuel Johnson's 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language*, a humanist was defined as a philologer or grammarian; in a later edition of Johnsons' dictionary the definition was extended to include "a term used in the schools of Scotland". The word *humanism* was not included in either dictionary.

Later, in the American Dictionary of the English Language (Webster, 1830) a humanist is defined as: "1. A professor of grammar and rhetoric; a philologist, and 2. One versed in the knowledge of human nature".

By 1898, a humanist was "one who pursues the study of the humanities, or polite literature; or one versed in knowledge of human nature".[3]

[1] https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/
[2] https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/
[3] In the 1916 3rd edition, 'polite literature' is replaced by 'polite learning'.

As for the term *humanism*, although occasional appearances of the word are to be found in the literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries (see below), the recognition of humanism as a distinct philosophy did not occur until the early 20th century. In 1907, for example, the British philosopher Professor Mackenzie delivered a series of lectures about humanism, which he defined "as a point of view from which human life is regarded as an independent centre of interest (...) or as being, in old Greek phraseology, the "helm" by which the universe is steered" (Mackenzie, 1907). Mackenzie specifically distinguished humanism from other two other philosophical movements prevalent at the time namely "pragmatism" (Schiller, 1903; 1907) and "naturalism" (Woodbridge, 1907). According to Woodbridge (*ibid*), what distinguished naturalism from humanism was that although both refrain from any appeal to supernatural or extraneous powers, "naturalism bases its interpretation of the world on objects as they are presented to us" whereas "humanism points us rather to the thinking subject for the interpretation of all that comes before it" (ibid, p.14). Woodbridge continued, "Humanism, as I here understand it, may be described in general as the attitude of mind which seeks the key to the world in the life of man, or, at any rate, the key to man's life within himself" (Woodbridge, *ibid*; pp.14-15). [4]

The philosopher and psychologist William James saw humanism in terms of his radical empiricism "known sometimes as the pragmatic method, some times as humanism, sometimes as Deweyism". For James, humanism represented a shifting of philosophic perspective such that "though one part of our experience may lean upon another part to make it what it is in any one of several aspects in which it may be considered, experience as a whole is self-containing and leans on nothing" (James, 1905). In a similar fashion, another pragmatist Ferdinand Schiller defined humanism as "the simplest of philosophic standpoints: it is merely the perception that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of human minds" (Schiller, 1907).

The above abstruse definitions of humanism are now obsolete and largely forgotten. Ironically, James (*ibid*) remarked that humanism "suffers badly at present from incomplete definition". Clearer definitions soon emerged under the 'scientific humanism' and 'secular humanism' movements (see sections 2.2 and 2.3 below), which eventually converged to the definitions found in most modern dictionaries.

A more unusual definition of humanism was given by the author E.M. Forster who wrote that "The humanist has four leading characteristics – curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race" (Forster, 1951). Forster's remark was specifically in relation to the French writer André Gide.

[4] Woodridge's paper was published in https://www.thehibberttrust.org.uk/our-projects/hibbert-journals

Thus, today, humanism is defined simply as "a system of thought which rejects the supernatural, any belief in a god" (Chambers)[5] or "a system of thought and reasoning based on human values and interests, often without accepting the beliefs of religion (Cambridge)[6] or "a philosophical position that stresses the autonomy of human reason in contradistinction to the authority of the Church" (Collins)[7]. The Chambers dictionary also defines humanism as "a cultural movement of the Renaissance period which promoted classical studies" and Collins includes an "interest in the welfare of people". Similar definitions can be found in other dictionaries.[8,9] But this is not the end of the definition story, which is taken up again in the Discussion (3.5).

1.3 Etymology

Although the tradition of Humanism can be traced back, so it is claimed, to the philosophers of ancient Greece and China (Knight, 1961), the English words *Humanism* and *Humanist* are relatively recent (Walter, 1997). The fact that the words are so recent "should be a warning against too close an identification of present and past" (Fowler, 1999, p.19).

According to The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, the first recorded use of the word (in English) was 1812, which it attributes to Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[10] But Coleridge did not coin the term *Humanism*. In fact, Coleridge's mention of it was one brief, oblique reference to the celebrated Unitarian disputes in the 1780s between Joseph Priestley and Thomas Howes (Priestley, 1786; Chandler, 2000).[11] Arguably, it is to Howes that the first recorded use should properly be attributed.

The term *humanista* was coined in Italy during the latter half of the 15th century Renaissance and became increasingly popular during the 16th century.[12] The term probably originated in the slang of university students before entering into official usage. So, initially at least, it was just another medieval term like *legista*, *jurista*, *canonista* and *artista* (Kristeller, 1960; 1984).

Similarly, according to Campana (1946) who conducted an extensive investigation into the origin of the word humanist, "...of the words of Italian origin which found their way into the European vocabularies at the time of the Renaissance few are more significant than word *umanista".* Campana concluded that "...the word is closely connected with the scholastic system: it qualifies a person as a public or private teacher of the classical literature, of the chair of *humanitas* or *umanità*".

Finally, Samuel Johnson's (1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the term humanist was derived from the French word *humaniste*.

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[5] https://chambers.co.uk/search/?query=humanism&title=21st
[6] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humanism
[7] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/humanism
[8] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/humanism
[9] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanism
[10] More specifically, in a note on religion, in which Coleridge criticises Socinianism. See Coleridge, S.T. (1812) Omniana 1812, Religion. In, H.N. Coleridge (1836) *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. *Volume The First*. London. William Pickering, p.377.
[11] In his dispute with Priestley, Howes writes that because of the different doctrinal meanings of Unitarian and Unitarianism concerning the humanity of Christ, "I shall hereafter drop those names and use the more precise appellations of *Humanists* and *Humanism*" (Howes, 1776-1780).
[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanitas

2. Types of humanism

Before considering these various types of humanism there are several important points and caveats to bear in mind. First, as noted out by Walter (1997), most of the Humanists of the past did not call themselves Humanists at the time. Neither in use were terms such as the *Renaissance* and *The Enlightenment*, which were applied retrospectively. Second, the humanism that is conjoined with the terms such as 'religious', 'ethical', 'secular', 'scientific', 'ecological', 'Marxist' and even 'Christian', emphasises a humanistic perspective to a particular set or grouping of human beliefs and practices. Taken to its logical extreme, any human activity can be humanistic and therefore to some extent everyone is a humanist, as several writers have indeed remarked (Kurtz, 1973; Fowler, 1999). In contrast to these qualified types of humanism there is another more specific meaning of humanism, which is a non-religious, ethical life-stance only.

These different types of humanism are described below.

2.1 Ethical Humanism

In the 19th century in the West there was considerable interest and debate concerning secularism, freethought, rationalism and ethical movements all of which contributed to the emergence of humanism. If modern humanism had a starting point, it was probably in America in 1876 when a young man called Felix Adler (see Figure 1) called for the formation of a new ethical organization, where people could meet to discuss "practical duties" to address the social evils in modern society. Such meetings would be simple and devoid of all ceremonial and formalism, and respectful of "every honest conviction" (Adler, 1876). That year he founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NYSEC), which was formally incorporated in 1877.[13, 14]

Adler's simply stated maxim was "not by the creed but by the deed" (Adler, 1877). It meant acting morally for its own sake – as opposed to being directed by religion – and working towards the advancement of social justice for all. In practice, it meant carrying out charitable and social projects, in particular the provision of education and improved access to healthcare for both adults and children.

Adler did not dismiss traditional religious beliefs outright (he was a Jew and had studied to be a rabbi), but rather thought that an ethical life was grounded in how we engaged the world, not necessarily in what we believed about the world. Adler later became a president of the Ethical Union (see Figure 9).

Figure 1. Felix Adler

Arguably, the interest in ethics, both in America and Britain, grew out of the moral values of Christianity, as to be Christian was thought of essentially in ethical terms. As Smart (1977) remarked, humanism is "another of Christianity's unruly children".

[13] https://ethical.nyc/history/
[14] https://heritage.humanists.uk/the-ethical-movement/

2.2 Scientific Humanism

Scientific humanism probably comes closest to modern-day humanism in that it emphasises science and technology as the means to understanding the world, particularly in opposition to religious or mythological interpretations. Scientific humanism "promotes the power of humanity to unfurl the secrets of the universe, to stride forward in the pursuit of knowledge, to take control of its own existence and to promote the well-being of the species" (Fowler, 1999, p. 21).

The term scientific humanism was coined in the 1920s by the American historian and political scientist Lothrop Stoddard to describe a Renaissance-like "intellectual and emotional development" of the human spirit to exploit the burgeoning knowledge of modern science. "The application of scientific knowledge and methods to current problems", he wrote, "is capable of raising the level of civilization to a higher plane" (Stoddard, 1926, p. 172).[15]

However, Stoddard's vision of a "new Renaissance" through scientific humanism was never really taken up in the US despite the enthusiasm for modern science as acknowledged in the Humanist Manifesto (AHA, 1933) and its later editions (AHA, 1973; 2003). It was the British biologist Julian Huxley[16] who proved more successful with his collection of essays for scientific humanism (Huxley, 1933).

Huxley was the first Director-General of UNESCO and played a critical role in defining its holistic philosophy about which he wrote: "...its outlook must be based on some form of world humanism, both in the sense of seeking to bring in all the peoples of the world, and of treating all peoples and all individuals within each people as equals in terms of human dignity, mutual respect, and educational opportunity. It must also be a scientific humanism, in the sense that the application of science provides most of the material basis for human culture, and also that the practice and the understanding of science need to be integrated with that of other human activities" (Huxley, 1946). This ideology is reflected in UNESCO's three primary areas of focus: Education, Science and Culture. Humanism, with its respect for cultural diversity and autonomy, underpins UNESCO's work in promoting intercultural understanding and protecting cultural heritage.

Despite Huxley's promotion of scientific humanism, the term was not widely adopted and appeared in only a few journal papers (Otto, 1943; Brophy, 1947). However, several decades later, the philosopher Antony Flew declared "I take my stand as a scientific Humanist" by which he meant he advocated a scientific approach to improving human welfare (Flew,1973). Whilst acknowledging that there is no universal agreement about what exactly constitutes welfare – one man's gain might be at another's loss – Flew asserted that "reformist conservatism rather than revolutionary utopianism is the rational constructive approach".

[15] Ironically, despite his admiration for the Renaissance humanists, Stoddard was unashamedly a white supremacist. In 1929, he debated with African American historian W.E.B. Du Bois on the assertion of the natural inferiority of coloured races.

[16] https://humanists.uk/humanism/the-humanist-tradition/20th-century-humanism/sir-julian-huxley/

2.3 Secular Humanism

Secular humanism (not to be confused with secularism, although closely related)[17] is a brand of humanism that originated in the early 20th century. Like scientific humanism (2.2), it emphasised the application of science and technology to improving human welfare, and promoted the ideals of reason and freedom. Where it differed to scientific humanism was its emphasis on naturalism. For example, as Sellars (1918) wrote, "the centre of gravity of religion has been openly changing for some time now from supernaturalism to what may best be called a *humanistic naturalism*" (italics added)". He continues, "secular life has found the means to perform functions which were formerly carried by the Church (...) today, ideas and enthusiasms find their organs in the teeming secular world".

John Dewey, professor of philosophy at Columbia University wrote extensively on the subject of religion and in particular the social place and function of religion. In his book *Common Faith* (Dewey, 1930a), he drew an important distinction between a religion and the religious experience. He observed that the idea of the supernatural, with which religions have traditionally been allied, has "oozed away" from the guardianship of any particular institution. Moreover, the encroachment of the secular upon ecclesiastic institutions has altered the way people spend their time in work and recreation. "The essential point", says Dewey (1930a), "is not just that secular organizations and actions are legally or externally severed from the control of the church, but that interests and values unrelated to the offices of any church now largely sway the desires and aims of even believers". The genuinely religious will undergo an "emancipation" when it is relieved of the "encumbrances" of religion; then, "the religious aspect of experience will be free to develop freely on its own account".

Both Sellars and Dewey were signatories to the Humanist Manifesto I, published in 1933.[18] Reflecting their own and other signatories' views, the manifesto did not dismiss religion, but stated that "*religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life (...) constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life*".[19] The manifesto comprised a list of 15 theses (e.g. "TWELFTH: Believing that religion must work increasingly for joy in living, religious humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life").

According to the American Humanist Association (AHA), which published the manifesto (and later versions), humanism "is a nontheistic worldview with ethical values informed by scientific knowledge and driven by a desire to meet the needs of people in the here and now".[20] By being nontheistic the AHA simply meant that there is no proof for the existence of god, the supernatural or an afterlife.

Figure 2. AHA logo

[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism
[18] https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/
[19] It was signed by 34 individuals (all men, but no women) comprising academics, writers, newspaper and magazine editors, and also including a Rabbi and some 8 Unitarian Church ministers.
[20] https://americanhumanist.org/about/

As the AHA's honorary president Kurt Vonnegut put it, "...being a Humanist means trying to behave decently without expectation of rewards or punishment after you are dead".[21] As for Dewey, "...what Humanism means to me is *an expansion, not a contraction, of human life, an expansion in which nature and the science of nature are made the willing servants of human good*" (Dewey, 1930b).

2.4 Civic Humanism

The term 'civic humanism' was originally developed in the first half of the twentieth century by the Renaissance historian Hans Baron and describes a political culture and philosophy originating in Renaissance Italy in the 1400s (Baron, 1966).[22] Civic humanism is a form of republicanism, but compared to classical republicanism (or civil republicanism) is wider in scope and stresses the central role of civic virtue and an active life dedicated to public affairs.

According to Baron, late medieval Italy was divided into two basic political groups: republics and tyrannies. Baron focused on the republic in Florence and argued that the city's brush with tyranny (i.e. the tyrants of Milan and Naples) in 1402 brought about the introduction of a new outlook called civic humanism. Baron saw Petrarch as the embodiment of the first phase of humanism before it became 'civic', pioneered by Salutati, Bruni and his followers.[23]

Thus, civic humanism formed the core of Italian Renaissance culture and, so claimed, rescued western civilization from a pre-modern world terrorized by the tyranny of petty despots. The discovery of a civic humanistic tradition was for Baron the germ of his famous "thesis" (Hankins, 1995).

2.5 Ecological Humanism

Ecological humanism is based on the recognition that human life cannot be independent of natural world and that the two are "inextricably interrelated" (Whiteside, 2002). Although it shares many of the same environmental concerns as organisations such as Friends of the Earth to "save the planet" (i.e. reduce waste, reduce emissions affecting the climate, stop pollution), ecological humanism emphasises that the world is shared by both human beings and all other living species. As Marietta (1979) put it, "...there is no separate human ecology. With increasing knowledge of the interdependence of life forms and the fragility of the life support systems of all species, Humanists must think ecologically. Rationality demands ecological Humanism".

2.6 Religious Humanism

Given that modern humanism is essentially secular and non-religious, 'religious Humanism' sounds like an oxymoron. But the original Humanist Manifesto I issued in 1933, was heavily influenced by Unitarians and Universalist schools of Christian theology, and its authors explicitly intended and expressed their expectation that Humanism would become the "religion of the future".[24]

[21] https://americanhumanist.org/about/faq/
[22] https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/european-humanism/humanists-and-europe/civic-humanism
[23] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coluccio_Salutati
[24] See signatories of the manifesto: https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/

2.6.1. Renaissance Humanism

The Renaissance emerged in Europe at a time when the Catholic Church held enormous power and influence, but rejecting Christianity was not the concern of the Renaissance scholars, the *humanista*. Arguably, Renaissance humanism reflected no fixed position towards religion, the state, or society. Some *humanista* became Protestants, others remained Catholic. In fact, many of the greatest works of the Renaissance were devoted to Christianity, and the Church patronized many works of Renaissance art. The art historian Kenneth Clark defined the humanism of the Italian 15th century masters "as a belief in the greatness of man and the supremacy of human values" (Clark, 1983).[25]

The Renaissance era has the reputation for rediscovering the classical world and ushering in humanism in the West. The term "Renaissance Humanism" (see 3.2.2) is so familiar that placing humanism during the long pre-Renaissance period seems precluded from consideration. Yet, although evidence of modern secular humanism will not be found anywhere in the medieval world, during this period (6th to 14th centuries) writers did indeed access and interpret the heritage of classical world in their own distinctive ways. Thus, Stoic Humanist ideas and ideals were partially adopted and perpetuated through the early Christian Fathers and later medieval theologians (Shook, 2021).

2.6.2. Christian Humanism

Christian humanism, as the term implies, is the philosophical view that Christian theology and principles are "ineluctably humanistic" (Bequette, 2016). Given that by definition it draws on the life of Jesus Christ, one might expect to find evidence of it in every epoch of Christian history over the past 2000 years, from Saint Augustine (354-430), The Venerable Bede (673-735) to scholars of the Renaissance. However, although the humanist scholars of the Renaissance were undoubtedly Christian, they were never thought of as scholars of Christian Humanism at the time. As Bush (1939) put it, "humanism in the Renaissance normally means Christian faith in alliance with God-given reason, which is the most human faculty in man".

2.6.3. Judaic Humanism

Judaic humanism is a Jewish movement that combines a non-theistic and humanistic outlook with the celebration of Jewish culture and identity while adhering to secular values and ideas. It affirms the right of individuals to shape their own lives independent of supernatural authority. The Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) was founded in late 1960s.[26, 27]

The Humanorah (see Figure 3) is the primary symbol of Humanistic Judaism used by the SHJ, intended as a non-theistic alternative to other Jewish symbols such as the Star of David.

Figure 3. The Humanorah

[25] Clark was referring to Alberti, Donatello, Uccello, Mantegna and Botticelli, the masters of architecture, painting and sculpture.

[26] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_for_Humanistic_Judaism

[27] https://shj.org/

2.7 Other Humanisms

In addition to the above types of humanism, many other uses of the term can be found including new associations. Here are some of them.

2.7.1. Political Humanism

If Humanism were simply a non-religious life-stance, one might suppose it also to be apolitical. However, as Koepsell (2015) remarks, "we are all necessarily immersed in politics, even if we feel apolitical". Given that modern Humanism has humanitarian, libertarian and progressive connotations, it is perhaps not surprising that it is typically associated with Western liberal values. However, as the American secular humanist Paul Kurtz cautioned, "if we were simply to identify Humanism with left-wing liberalism or democratic socialism (...) then neither Aristotle nor Hume nor George Santayana could be considered Humanists, for they were decidedly conservative" (Kurtz, 1973).

Karl Marx famously remarked that religion "is the opium of the people", by which he meant that religion relieved people's suffering by giving them pleasant illusions. Marx maintained in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* that "communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism".[28] He also attacked (19th century) industrial capitalism for its dehumanising divisions of labour, alienating the worker from the products of his/her own labour.[29,30] However, the term 'humanism", like the related term "alienation", soon lost favour and all but disappeared from the writings of Marx (and Engels), except as a term of abuse (Hodges, 1965).[31] Although Marxist Humanism inspired other humanists throughout the world, "the philosophy of Marx was corrupted when it became a question of revolution and overthrowing existing societies by force" (Waller, 1973, p.109).

Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban revolution, on taking power, famously declared "liberty with bread, without terror – that is Humanism"! Indeed, Cuba could have become the first Humanist country in the world, but unfortunately its version of socialism meant "the people got little bread, less liberty, and much terror" (Walter, 1997). The same criticism could probably be said of other socialist/communist leaders from Lenin to Mao.

Interest in socialist humanism was revived in the 1960s, in particular by the social psychologist and psychiatrist Erich Fromm who organised an international symposium on the subject (Fromm, 1965). The aims of the symposium, with over 30 papers presented, were "to clarify the problems of Humanist socialism in its various theoretical aspects, and to demonstrate that socialist Humanism is no longer the concern of a few dispersed intellectuals, but a movement to be found throughout the world, developing independently in different countries" (Fromm, *ibid*).[32]

[28] The exact meanings of terms such as "socialism", "communism" and "humanism" as used by Marx, are open to interpretation – see https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/footnote.htm
[29] https://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/index.htm
[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_humanism
[31] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_humanism#Alienation
[32] The symposium included a paper by Bertrand Russell, "In Praise of Idleness".

2.7.2. Existential Humanism

The French philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre is well known as one of the major 20th century proponents of existentialism. Sartre defined existentialism as the philosophical belief that "existence comes before essence", which he contrasted with the reverse belief (held by Diderot, Voltaire "and even in Kant") that man possesses a 'human nature' and that this nature, this essence of man, is prior to his existence. But for Sartre, man is a "being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it (...) that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards (...) Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (Sartre, 1946).

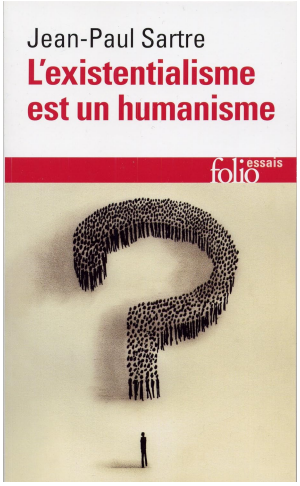


Figure 4. Existentialism is a Humanism (Sartre)

According to Sartre, existentialism is also a form of humanism. Because Man is all the time outside of himself, pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. He is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence. This relation of transcendence, in the sense of self-surpassing – it is this that we call existential humanism. This is humanism, because by seeking beyond himself, man can realize himself as truly human.

2.7.3. Digital Humanism

Digital humanism is a term coined in the last decade by academics and researchers concerned about the relationship between computer science/informatics and society, and in particular how to ensure that information technology is developed for people and not the other way around. A workshop held in 2019 resulted in The Digital Humanism Initiative[33] and the Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism (Werthner et al, 2022; Werthner et al, 2024). The authors wished to stress that humans should be at the centre of the digital world and technological progress should improve human freedom, peace, and progress in harmony with nature.

The term Digital Humanism was first introduced in the German-speaking world by Julian Nida-Rümelin and Nathalie Weidenfeld with their book *Digitaler Humanismus* (Piper Verlag, 2018).

[33] https://caiml.org/dighum/#about-digital-humanism

3. History and Spread of Humanism

The world's major religions have, despite their many schisms, branches, schools and other divisions, all retained a core set of beliefs throughout their long histories. In contrast, the evolution of humanism has been historically far more fragmentary, if not at times completely disconnected. As stated in the Introduction, humanism does not have a founding prophet or teacher, and hence there is no specific birthplace and time from which humanism grew and spread across the world. That being said, if humanism has a starting point, it is with the ethical movements that developed in the second half of the 19th century.

As illustrated in Figure 5, humanism differs from the major religions in that it has claimed historical roots going backwards *beyond* its 19th century origins to the Renaissance, and even earlier to Greek antiquity, to establish its historical roots. Whether or not this retrospective history-making is valid is an interesting question, which will be addressed later (3.5).

Putting aside the evident problem of historical continuity, the following overview of the history and spread of humanism, begins with humanism in antiquity before turning to humanism in the Middle Ages, and finally humanism in the modern era.

3.1 Ancient Humanism

Modern humanism, particularly from the mid-20th century onwards, has made a strong claim that humanist values are rooted in the classical civilizations of Greece, Rome and China. For example, as Knight (1961) put it, "humanism derives from a far older tradition than Christianity". Similarly, in the words of Fletcher (1968), "the Humanist tradition is of far greater antiquity than Christianity".

Knight's seminal *Humanist Anthology* consists of extracts from a selection of 69 famous philosophers, historians and writers from the 6th century BC to the 20th century. The chronological anthology highlighted three ancient Chinese (Lao Tzu, Confucius and Mencius), five Greeks (Thucydides, Epicurus, Plutarch, Epictetus and Celsus) and five Romans (Cicero, Lucretius, Seneca, Pliny the Elder and Marcus Aurelius). Harold Blackham, widely regarded as the father of British humanism and the leading figure in its international growth, also expounded the view that "modern humanism can be traced back to Greek thinkers, notably, Democritus, Protagoras and other Sophists (Isocrates), the Epicureans" (New Humanist, 1988).

Whether or not these ancient philosophers can be considered the forebears of modern humanism, is a moot point (see Discussion). Its ancient roots are now largely accepted (or promoted) without question. According to Lamont (1997), "in the West the philosophic tradition goes back some 2,500 years to the ancient Greeks; in the East it is of about equal length if we take the teachings of Confucius in China and Buddha in India as our starting points". According to Humanists UK, "the thread of humanist thinking runs throughout human history" – from Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa – and now covers 3000 years (see Figure 6).[34]

[34] https://humanists.uk/humanism-explained/humanist-history/3000-years-of-humanists/

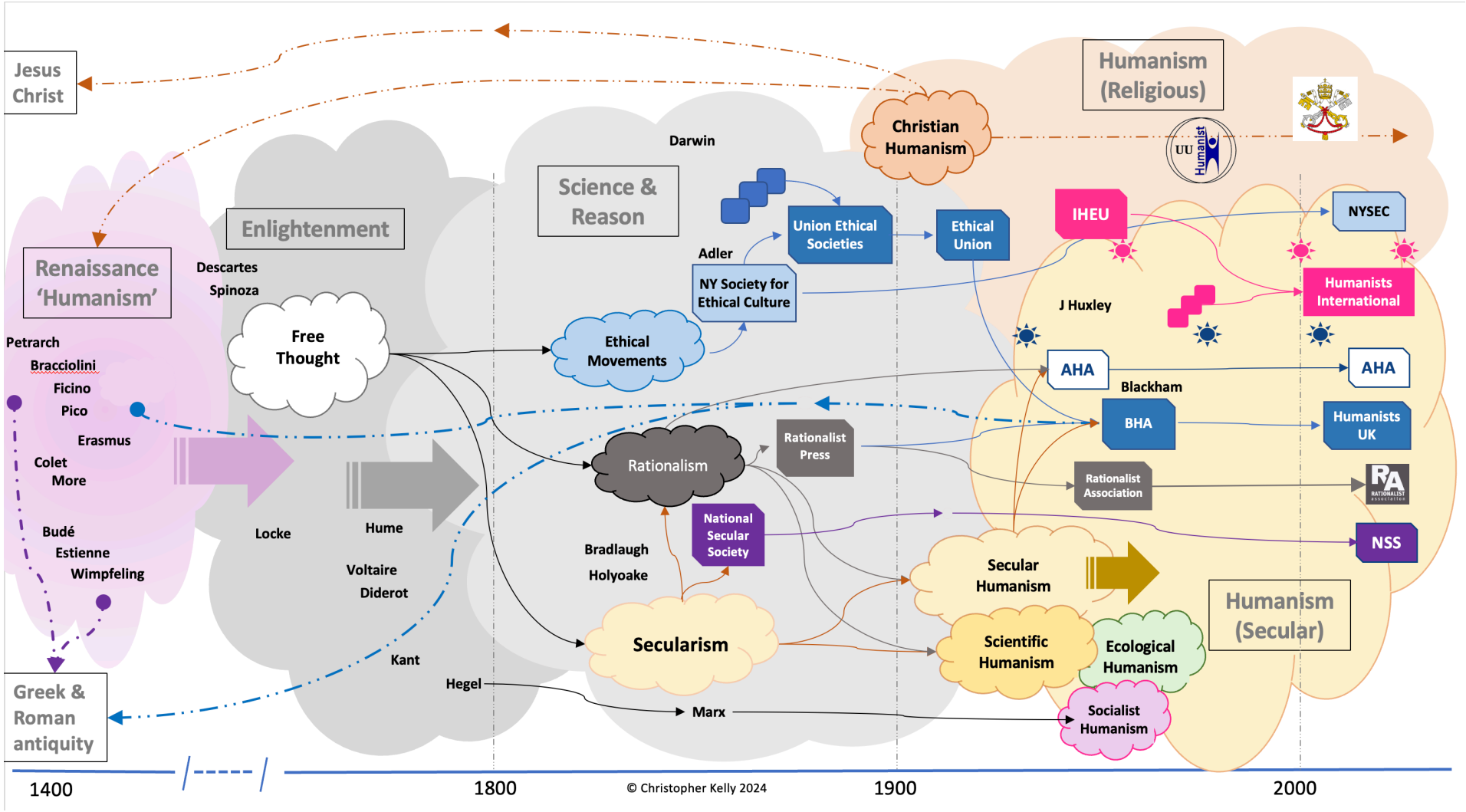


Figure 5. Historical evolution of Humanism

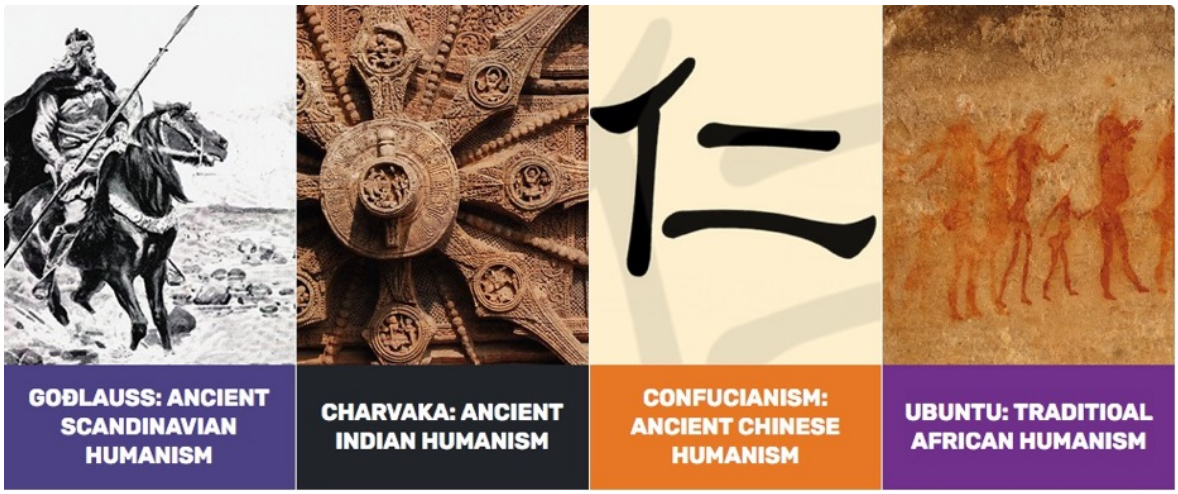


Figure 6. Ancient roots of humanism (Humanists UK)

However, according to the historian Tom Holland, even if isolated precursors of humanist beliefs are to be found scattered in ancient texts, this does not in itself demonstrate an evolutionary relationship between them (Holland, 2022).

It should also be noted that the Oxford Handbook of Humanism (Pinn, 2021), which covers the history of Humanism through the ages and across the world, specifically does not include a chapter on the "Ancient World", preferring instead that the handbook "*weaves attention to ancient sources and structures of thought into the various regions and themes covered*..."

3.2 Medieval Humanism

Medieval Humanism is largely if not wholly associated with the Renaissance.[35] It arose out of the particular social and cultural circumstances of 13th century Italy. It came to maturity in the 15th to 16th centuries, spreading from Italy to the rest of Europe, before gradually losing its vitality in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The history from late antiquity to the dawning of the Renaissance (roughly 5th to 14th centuries), is often dismissed as a period of cultural decline and intellectual darkness (the "Dark Ages") following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. This characterisation is now recognised as being misleading and inaccurate.[36]

3.2.1. Pre-Renaissance

According to McGuire (1953), medieval humanism should be considered merely as one phase of Christian humanism. "Medieval humanism (...) would hardly be conceivable unless Christianity (...) had found an important place in its own system for pagan literature and learning long before the Middle Ages began". Origen and Clement of Alexandria were the first to make use of pagan cultural achievements, but "Christian Humanism burst into full flower in the fourth and fifth centuries (...) Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Rufinus, Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, and Augustine of Hippo".

[35] Middle Ages is divided into: Early Middle Ages 500 – 1000 ("The Dark Ages"); High Middle Ages 1000 – 1350; and Late Middle ages 1350 – 1500 (Start of Protestant Reformation challenging the Catholic Church....

[36] According to C.S. Lewis, the term 'medieval' is a humanist invention. That a 1,000 years' history of theology, metaphysics, jurisprudence, courtesy, poetry and architecture could be dismissed as a mere gap or chasm is a "preposterous conception" (Lewis, 1954). See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Ages_(historiography)

With regard to philosophy, Stoicism was the only non-Christian ethics widely available to European thinkers after the Roman Empire collapsed. Augustine found many Stoic virtues to be commendable, particularly the four "cardinal" virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. The ethics of Cicero and Seneca are given a Christianized form in *De Officiis* of St. Ambrose, and most of the great fathers of the Church are Christian Platonists or Christian Neoplatonist (...) The fusion of pagan and Christian thought in Antiquity culminates in Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius" (*ibid*, p. 401-2).

Boethius's *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, contained several elements of Greek ethics, and was the most popular philosophical handbook of the Middle Ages (

Figure ***7***). Remarkably, it was first translated into the English vernacular in the 9th century by the warrior king, Alfred the Great! It is from Boethius that this oft-quoted sentence is to be found: "This is now especially to be said; that I wished to live honourably whilst I lived, and after my life to leave to the men who were after me, my memory in good works" (Alfred Committee, 1852).

Around the end of the 11th and start of the 12th centuries, there was a revival of cultural and literary activity in the Western provinces of France-Maine, Anjou, Touraine and Normandy. Leading figures in this movement were Hildebert of Lavardin, Marbod of Angers, and Reginald of Canterbury.

Figure 7. Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy[37]

These men were not philosophers per se, but scholars, theologians and poets who prided themselves on their knowledge of the classics. This ecclesiastical courtly culture "foreshadowed the later development of Western Humanism (...) to the early Italian humanism of Petrarch in the fourteenth century" (Dawson, 1957).

The spirit of medieval humanism found its most complete embodiment in John of Salisbury. John not only borrowed the vocabulary of his classical forbears, Seneca and Cicero, but explicitly aligned himself with their Stoic theories on duties, virtuous rulership and moderation relevant to the medieval context (Daly, 2018). According to Dawson (1957), he was one of the pioneers of the Aristotelian revival. Benzo, Bishop of Alba, was another remarkable writer who anticipated Dante in his enthusiasm for the ancient Roman tradition, foreshadowing the approaching renaissance of the political conception of the state (Dawson, *ibid*).

[37] See https://www.wallacecollection.org/explore/collection/search-the-collection/frontispiece-of-book-ii-of-boethius-de-consolatione-philosophiae/

3.2.2. Renaissance Humanism

The Renaissance (from the French "rebirth") was a period in European history marking the transition from the late Middle Ages to the modern era, in particular covering the 15th and 16th centuries.[38] It is conventionally held to have been characterised by a surge of interest in classical scholarship and values. While the spirit of the Renaissance ultimately took many forms in science and politics, poetry and the arts, it was expressed earliest by the scholars of *studia humanitatis* (i.e. Latin phrase for 'studies of humanity' or simply the 'humanities'), and the professional teacher of which was called *humanista*.

Crucially, the term *humanista* did not represent a new philosophical movement or ideology (as 19th century humanists believed), but instead the teaching of a certain branch of learning, well limited in its subject matter. It was a cultural movement centred on grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy.[39] The Italian humanists extended the knowledge of existing classical Latin literature by discovering manuscripts of Roman authors and works that had been forgotten, e.g. Lucretius and Tacitus. They copied, edited and expounded the texts, studying the grammar, style, and subject matter of those authors. The diffusion of these texts would be widened even further after the introduction of printing.

The literature about Renaissance humanism is vast (e.g. Burckhardt, 1860; Bush, 1939; Kristeller, 1960, 1984, 1990; Revest, 2013; Monfasani, 2021; Shook, 2021; Ballard, 2022), but for the purposes of this review, it is only necessary to highlight a few key points.[40]

Renaissance scholars also did something of great historical importance, namely that they gradually translated into Latin the entire body of classical Greek literature, largely unknown or ignored in the Middle Ages (Kristeller, 1960). Thus, Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and scepticism all experienced revivals. In addition, many Greek Christian works, including the Greek New Testament, were brought back from Byzantium to Western Europe and engaged Western scholars for the first time since late antiquity, which would help pave the way for the Protestant Reformation (Ballard, 2022).

Its leading protagonists held jobs primarily as teachers of grammar and literature. Outside academia, they served as secretaries, ambassadors and bureaucrats; some were jurists (Monfasani, 2021). Among the most famous of these teachers were: Poggio Bracciolini, Jakob Wimpfeling, John Colet, Thomas More, Marsilio Ficino, Erasmus, Guillaume Budé, Robert Estienne, and many more.[41] Importantly, the great men of the Renaissance were spiritual men and their achievements were dependent on Christian antecedents. If Renaissance humanism was about a rediscovery of man and the natural world (in the classical texts), the act of discovery was carried out not by the natural man, but by a "Christian man, the human type that had been produced by ten centuries of ascetic discipline and intensive cultivation of the inner life" (Dawson, 1931).

[38] The term Middle Ages was coined by scholars in the 15th century to designate the interval between the downfall of the classical world of Greece and Rome (the so-called "dark ages") and its rediscovery at the beginning of their own century, a revival in which they felt they were participating.
[39] Their notion of poetry was far removed from the modern romantic notion of the creative poet. For them, poetry was largely the ability to write verse, especially Latin verse. Thus, there are long poems on ancient history, such as Petrarch's Africa, on contemporary wars, in praise of princes and cities, and in praise of Columbus' discoveries (Kristeller, 1960).
[40] See also, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_humanism
[41] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Renaissance_humanists

According to Jacob Burckhardt, "the fourteenth century was chiefly stimulated by the writings of Cicero... This humanism was in fact pagan, and became more and more so as its sphere widened in the fifteenth century...".[42]

The heritage of Renaissance humanism runs deep in our culture. It influenced virtually every aspect of high culture in the West. As it penetrated the wider culture, it was combined with other disciplinary interests and professions so that one found humanist philosophers, physicians, theologians, lawyers, mathematicians and so forth. However, a subtle shift took place in the way that intellectuals approached religion that was reflected in many other areas of cultural life (Ballard, 2022).

By throwing off the yoke of the Church, scholasticism and the universities, the Renaissance humanists ushered in the modern world, i.e. the Enlightenment, which then morphed into secular humanism and other offshoots of free thought (see Figure 5). In the 19th century, it did not so much die as become metamorphosed (Monfasani, 2021).

3.3 Modern Humanism – Ethical and Secular

3.3.1. Ethical Movements

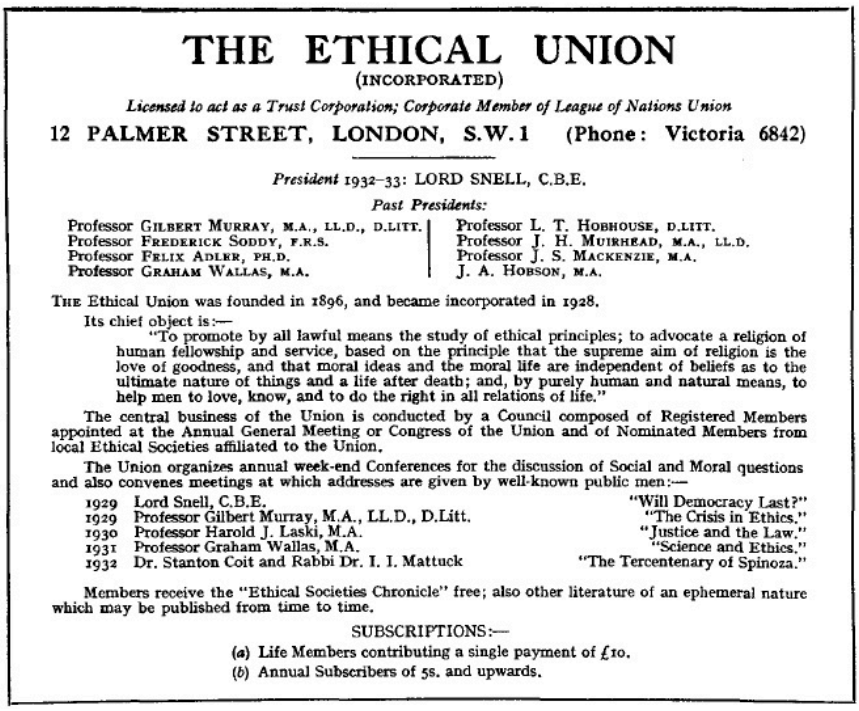
In the US, the NYSEC created by Felix Adler in 1876 still exists today (Figure 8). As it says on their website, the organization is non-theistic and humanist in emphasis, and members are not committed to any theology – "they leave belief in a deity up to the individual".[43]

Figure 8. NYSEC logo

In the UK, drawing on the pioneering efforts of Adler in America, the Union of Ethical Societies was founded in 1896. In 1920 it was renamed the Ethical Union, and formally incorporated in 1928 (see Figure 9).

The Ethical Union continued well into the 20th century working with, for example, the Rationalist Press Association (RPA). In 1957, British Humanist Association (BHA) was formed as an umbrella organisation between the two organizations, which was inaugurated in 1963. Then, in 1965, the Ethical Union was struck off the charities' register on a technicality of its constitution (being propagandist), and shortly afterwards the BHA (one of whose 'objects' was to advance the aims and objects of the Ethical Union) was removed. This made it legally impossible for the RPA to continue its partnership. The Humanist Trust was set up to focus on educational work.[44]

[42] https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2074/2074-h/2074-h.htm
[43] https://ethical.nyc/about/
[44] https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1971-02-25/debates/79190ccf-fa45-4328-8035-43d4072e0085/TheHumanistTrust



THE ETHICAL UNION
(INCORPORATED)

Licensed to act as a Trust Corporation; Corporate Member of League of Nations Union

12 PALMER STREET, LONDON, S.W.1 (Phone: Victoria 6842)

President 1932–33: LORD SNELL, C.B.E.

Past Presidents:

Professor GILBERT MURRAY, M.A., LL.D., D.LITT. | Professor L. T. HOBHOUSE, D.LITT.
Professor FREDERICK SODDY, F.R.S. | Professor J. H. MUIRHEAD, M.A., LL.D.
Professor FELIX ADLER, PH.D. | Professor J. S. MACKENZIE, M.A.
Professor GRAHAM WALLAS, M.A. | J. A. HOBSON, M.A.

THE Ethical Union was founded in 1896, and became incorporated in 1928.

Its chief object is:—

"To promote by all lawful means the study of ethical principles; to advocate a religion of human fellowship and service, based on the principle that the supreme aim of religion is the love of goodness, and that moral ideas and the moral life are independent of beliefs as to the ultimate nature of things and a life after death; and, by purely human and natural means, to help men to love, know, and to do the right in all relations of life."

The central business of the Union is conducted by a Council composed of Registered Members appointed at the Annual General Meeting or Congress of the Union and of Nominated Members from local Ethical Societies affiliated to the Union.

The Union organizes annual week-end Conferences for the discussion of Social and Moral questions and also convenes meetings at which addresses are given by well-known public men:—

1929	Lord Snell, C.B.E.	"Will Democracy Last?"
1929	Professor Gilbert Murray, M.A., LL.D., D.Litt.	"The Crisis in Ethics."
1930	Professor Harold J. Laski, M.A.	"Justice and the Law."
1931	Professor Graham Wallas, M.A.	"Science and Ethics."
1932	Dr. Stanton Coit and Rabbi Dr. I. I. Mattuck	"The Tercentenary of Spinoza."

Members receive the "Ethical Societies Chronicle" free; also other literature of an ephemeral nature which may be published from time to time.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:—

(*a*) Life Members contributing a single payment of £10.
(*b*) Annual Subscribers of 5s. and upwards.

Figure 9. Incorporation of Ethical Union, 1928

3.3.2. British Humanism

As mentioned earlier, the BHA was created out of the old Ethical Union. It was established formally in 1967 and continued for the next fifty years until, in 2017, it changed its operating name to Humanists UK (see Figure 10).

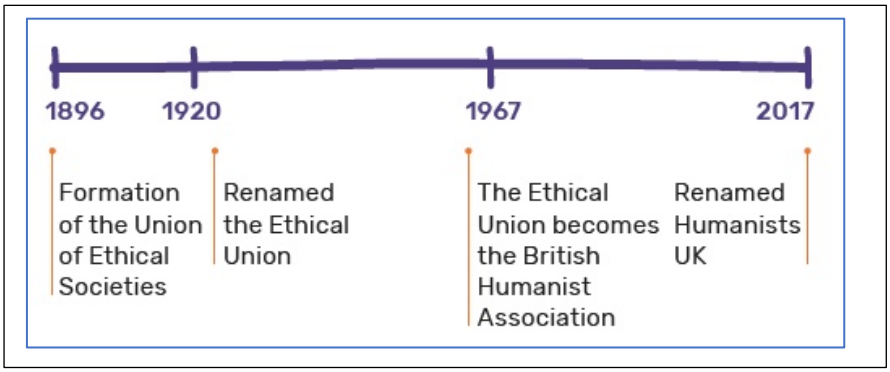


Figure 10. Humanists UK timeline[45]

A key person in establishing the BHA was Harold Blackham (1903-2009) who was effectively its founder and first director (see Figure 5). He wrote extensively on the subject of humanism and worked with the ethical organisations in Britain and other countries, and also with new Humanist organisations around the world. With the Dutch philosopher and humanist leader Jaap van Praag he founded the IHEU in 1952.

[45] See also https://heritage.humanists.uk/timeline/#

Blackham was undoubtedly one of the most significant figures in 20th century Humanism. Of particular significance was that he perceived a humanist tradition originating in the ancient world, with Greeks such as Epicurus, developing through the Renaissance and Enlightenment to emerge in the secularism and ethical movements of the 19th century. To the extent that Blackham's view is correct, he has a strong claim to have been the architect of modern humanism.[46, 47]

Figure 11. Secular humanism emerges in the UK (The Christian Institute)

Since renaming itself as Humanists UK, the organisation has been very active in promoting humanism. In 2020, it published *The Little Book of Humanism*, which provides a collection of "inspiring and thought-provoking words (…) containing universal lessons on finding purpose, meaning and joy in our lives" (Copson and Roberts, 2020).

In 2021 Humanists UK launched its **Humanist Heritage** Project to explore the development of humanist ideas in the UK and to highlight many important individuals in its history including some neglected figures.[48]

Arguably, not all the chosen words are inspiring, and not all the heritage individuals associated their beliefs specifically with humanism. But, see 3.5.2 below for further discussion!

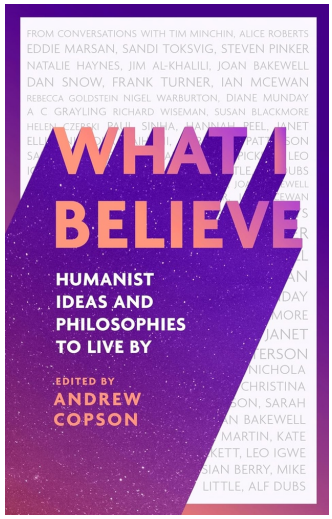


Figure 12. What I Believe (Humanists UK)

In 2024, Humanists UK is publishing another book, *What I Believe*, (Figure 12), a collection of interviews with various humanists in the public eye, from the philosopher A.C. Grayling to the actor and writer Stephen Fry (Copson, 2024). The title of the book is inspired by the 'What I Believe' essays of the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the novelist E M Forster.[49]

[46] https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/1986/obituary-harold-blackham
[47] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/09/obituary-harold-blackman-humanist
[48] https://heritage.humanists.uk/
[49] Ironically, Russell never wrote about being a humanist and disliked the label (see 3.5.2).

3.3.3. American Humanism

The American Humanist Association (AHA) was founded in 1941, although its history can be traced back to 1927 when professors and seminarians at the University of Chicago organized the Humanist Fellowship and began publishing the *New Humanist* magazine. By 1935 the Fellowship had become the Humanist Press Association, replacing the *New Humanist* with the *Humanist Bulletin*, which in turn was superseded by the *Humanist* magazine.

As stated previously, John Dewey was one of the signatories to the 1933 Humanist Manifesto and "Humanism's most notable spokesman" (Meyer, 1982). However, it was probably Dewey's other writings, particularly about "progressive education" that indirectly had the biggest impact on the spread of secular humanism. In fact, Dewey is credited with having made the most deep and lasting impression on educational theory and practice in the United States (Hardon, 1952). But secular humanism had its bitter critics too, especially the (Catholic) Church for whom, according to Bishop Hallinan, it represented "the greatest challenge to Christianity today (...) a popular, bland, respectable faith (...) often called the American way of life" (Anon, 1961).

Dewey died in 1952 and it was left to another professor of philosophy, Paul Kurtz, to take up the cause of secular humanism (Kurtz, 1973). Secular humanism was not formally established until 1980 when Kurtz founded the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH) that advocated a non-religious life stance of positive, rational ethics, which he called secular humanism. Kurtz was also responsible for drafting 'A Secular Humanist Declaration', which was published in the first issue of the Free Inquiry magazine in Winter 1980/81.[50] The Declaration was reproduced in the New Humanist magazine of the Rationalist Press Association. Today, CODESH is known as the Council for Secular Humanism.[51]

Figure 13. Council for Secular Humanism.

At the same time as the AHA was establishing itself, a 'New Humanism' emerged in the 1920s and 1930s led by a small but influential group of American critics such as Irving Babbitt and Paul More, and including the well-known poet and essayist T.S. Eliot (Foerster, 1930). Dewey was highly critical of the movement for its anti-romantic and anti-naturalistic negativity that "would seem to doom the new movement to sterility" and predicted it would end up "a paragraph in a chapter on early Twentieth Century American Letters", which is effectively what happened (Dewey, 1930b).[52]

3.3.4. Ecological Humanism

Ecological humanism emerged in the late 1960s / early 1970s around the same time that various environmental movements, such as Friends of the Earth, began campaigning for society to better protect the environment and "save the planet". Throughout the 60s scientists had become alarmed about the environmental damage been done. The Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* report remains a seminal publication (Meadows et al, 1972).

[50] https://secularhumanism.org/1981/01/a-secular-humanist-declaration-2/
[51] https://secularhumanism.org/about-the-council-for-secular-humanism/
[52] Oxford Reference, New Humanism.

The subject attracted the attention of various scientists, futurists and other writers. In the US, Victor Ferkiss outlined principles of "necessary utopia" i.e. an ecological humanism that implies man's conscious relationship with nature and with other men (Ferkiss, 1969; 1974). Central to Ferkiss' philosophy was achieving a "balance society", by which he meant in particular, "ecological humanism must create an economy in which economic and population growth is halted, technology is controlled, and gross inequalities of income are done away with (Ferkiss, 1974, p.235).

In France, Philippe Saint-Marc advocated a balanced development policy inspired by what he called *l'écologie humaniste* (Saint-Marc, 1971). He perceived that the destiny of mankind was deeply dependent on the preservation of his environment, and in particular defended the cause of nature by opposing the power of money.

According to Waller (1973), the world is experiencing an ecological crisis due to pollution and contamination of the environment by "unecological technologies", causing deterioration of soils and exhausting nature. He warns, "if man lives by a false philosophy that reduces him to anything less than his own nature, he too will perish. That again is the lesson that humanism must teach" (Waller, *ibid*, p.90). Human ecology helps to focus science upon the needs of humanity, "forcing technology to reform itself. It is in the humanist tradition and can be described as ecological humanism" (Waller, *ibid*, p.105).

For Skolimowski (1975), ecological humanism "marks the return of the unitary view in which the philosophy of man and the philosophy of nature are aspects of each other (...) Ecological Humanism requires broadening the concept of ecology to encompass the balance of the human environment; the natural world then becomes vested with the same 'value' as the human world" (p.37). According to Morris (2017), Skolimowski's humanism is "a form of evolutionary spiritualism".

Today, interest in ecological humanism has faded or at least has been subsumed under environmental or other 'green' initiatives. As part of its Humanist Heritage project, Humanists UK produced "a brief history of humanist environmentalism". The article highlights Don Marietta's short article in the *New Humanist* (Marietta, 1979) and Julian Huxley.[53] Huxley is well known as one of the leading humanists in the UK, including being the first president of the BHA.[54] He was possibly the first person to draw attention to the "ecological approach" (Huxley, 1961). However, none of the above writers (Ferkiss, Waller, Skolimowski) or other pioneers such as Mumford, Dubos and Bookchin (Morris, 2017), are mentioned.

[53] https://heritage.humanists.uk/article/a-brief-history-of-humanist-environmentalism/
[54] https://heritage.humanists.uk/julian-huxley/

3.3.5. International Humanism

Modern humanism is probably best represented by the global Humanists International, which brings together a diverse grouping of humanist, rationalist, secular, ethical culture, atheist and freethought non-religious organisations and individuals from all over the world.[55] It was founded in August 1952 as the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), but in 2019 changed its name to Humanists International (Figure 14).[56]

Figure 14. Humanists International

In 1996, the IHEU drew up the following 'Minimum Statement' about Humanism that any organisation wishing to become a member of the IHEU would be expected to accept:

"*Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality*."[57]

Now registered in New York, USA and the UK (Glasgow), Humanists International is an international non-governmental organisation with representation on various United Nations committees and other international bodies. In 1952, at the first World Humanist Congress, the founders of Humanists International agreed on a statement of the fundamental principles of modern Humanism. They called it "The Amsterdam Declaration".[58] The Declaration was revised and re-issued in 2002 and again in 2022. This new statement declares the following definitive guiding principles:

1. Humanists strive to be ethical.
2. Humanists strive to be rational.
3. Humanists strive for fulfilment in their lives.
4. Humanism meets the widespread demand for a source of meaning and purpose to stand as an alternative to dogmatic religion, authoritarian nationalism, tribal sectarianism, and selfish nihilism.

[55] At the time of writing (Nov 2023) there are 122 members from Accra Atheists in Ghana to Watford Area Humanists in the UK.
[56] https://humanists.international/2019/02/humanists-international/
[57] https://humanists.international/policy/iheu-minimum-statement-on-humanism/
[58] https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/

3.4 Modern Humanism – Religious

3.4.1. Christian Humanism

As with other types of humanism, Christian humanism as a distinct philosophy, was never expounded until the early 20th century. One of the first people to use the term Christian Humanism was an American minister called Russell Henry Stafford who published a book titled *Christian Humanism* in which he asserts that "Jesus was a humanist" (Stafford, 1928).[59] His book, a collection of his sermons, appears to have been written directly in response to the rise of "contemporary humanism", by which he meant the social idealism of Bertrand Russell and the Ethical Movement inspired by Felix Adler. Perhaps a little surprisingly, Stafford was very complementary about Russell's recently published book[60] and even more so about Adler who he called "that true prophet of righteousness". But according to Stafford, the humanism of Jesus was far better because its scope was not limited to life on earth, but infused with the "light of heaven" and "with such a glow as is lamentably lacking in most mere humanists".

For the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, Christian humanism is a theocentric kind of humanism that sees the centre for man is God, which is in contrast to the anthropocentric kind of humanism that believes man is his own centre, and therefore the centre of all things (Maritain, 1938). As a devout Christian, Maritain strongly argued for the Christian conception of man. Against the background of the attacks on freedom posed by fascism, communism and emerging Nazism (in the 1930s), Maritain also called for a new 'integral humanism' that he believed would be "*able to save and to promote, under the terms of a fundamentally different synthesis, all the truths affirmed or brought to light by socialist humanism, by uniting them in a way which is vital and organic with numerous other truths*" (Maritain, 1938).

In response to the growing influence of secular humanism, the Catholic Church issued a papal encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, declaring the need for a new "transcendent" and "full-bodied" humanism "open to the values of the spirit and to God (...) which offers us the real meaning of human life" (Vatican, 1969). The message from Pope Paul IV was reinforced by Pope Benedict XVI who called for a "Christian Humanism that enkindles charity and takes its lead from truth, accepting both as a lasting gift from God". In evident hostility to secular humanism, he added in conclusion that "humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism" (Vatican, 2009).[61]

The Renaissance scholar Paul Oskar Kristeller pointed out the obvious fact that all humanists during the Renaissance were Christians. Kristeller did consider the possibility that some of those humanists might include "scholars who explicitly discussed religious or theological problems in all or some of their writings" (Kristeller, 1961). Nauert goes further than Kristeller in arguing that these particular scholars not only discussed such religious problems, but also made a connection with their study of ancient Christianity. "That connection between their scholarly efforts and their longing for spiritual and institutional renewal is the specific characteristic that distinguishes "Christian Humanists" as a group from other humanists who just happened to be religious" (Nauert, 2006).

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[59] Stafford was a minister at the Old South Church in Boston, Massachusetts https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_South_Church#Senior_ministers

[60] Education and the Good Life

[61] The Wikipedia page on Christian humanism presents a very different (and in my view muddled) history to the one outlined above, asserting that Christian Humanism originated during the Renaissance "with the early work of figures such as Jakob Wimpfeling, John Colet, and Thomas More".

Whilst acknowledging the meaning of humanism is not always clear, Canon Dr Angus Ritchie and Nick Spencer argue that Christianity shares much in common with humanism and that Christians should think of themselves as humanists: "humanism comprises a positive (set of) creed(s) that are consonant with Christianity and worthy of Christian support" (Ritchie and Spencer, 2014). Although the authors claim that only belief in God can sustain some of humanism's most fundamental claims, "the sheer range of the similarities between the fundamentals outlined in IHEU Amsterdam Declaration and mainstream Christian commitments powerfully suggests that even in its modern, more exclusive incarnation – as opposed to the more generous, historical one – it is entirely right for Christians to be humanists" (Ritchie and Spencer, 2014).

3.4.2. Judaic Humanism

Support for Judaic Humanism has continued to the present day since Rabbi Sherwin Wine (1928-2007) helped establish the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) in 1969. Wine founded the Centre for New Thinking in 1977, and the Voice of Reason coalition to oppose right-wing religious activists in 1981.[62] In the 1990s, it was estimated that there were about 40,000 members in the United States, Israel, Europe and elsewhere (Cohn-Sherbok, 1996).

Not surprisingly, orthodox Jews regarded the idea of an atheist rabbi as risible, blasphemous and contradictory. Denying God, in their view, kicked away Judaism's core belief and undermined authentic Jewish spirituality (Joffe, 2007).

Reconstructionist Judaism is another offshoot of traditional Judaism. It is an American Jewish denomination founded in the last century that seeks to unite Jewish history, tradition, culture and belief with modern scientific knowledge and the way people live today.[63]

3.4.3. Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association

The Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association (UUHA) was founded in 1962 by Edwin H. Wilson, Lester Mondale, and others.[64] It was originally called the "Fellowship of Religious Humanists", then the "Friends of Religious Humanism", and until recently the "HUUmanists". The UU Humanist Association is a related organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association (link is external) (UUA), and was founded to advance Humanism within Unitarian Universalism and to promote Humanism in general. Many UU Humanist members are also members or friends of UUA congregations.

Figure 15. UU Humanists

[62] https://sherwinwine.com/birmingham-temple-and-cnt-1963-2007/
[63] https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/subdivisions/reconstructionist_1.shtml
[64] https://huumanists.org/about/religious-humanism

3.5 Discussion

3.5.1. So, what is humanism?

As noted at the beginning of this review (1.2), in 1905 William James had remarked that humanism "suffers badly at present from incomplete definition". In 1973, the American secular humanist Paul Kurtz wrote that "humanism is so charged with levels of emotion and rhetoric that its meaning is often vague and ambiguous" (and consequently) "humanism can mean whatever we want it to" (Kurtz, 1973). For another writer, "the meaning of 'humanism' has so many shades that to analyze all of them is hardly feasible" (Giustiniani, 1985). Fifty years after Kurtz's words, it is evident that much confusion about humanism still remains. As the author Sarah Bakewell recently put it, humanism "is a semantic cloud of meanings and implications, none attachable to any particular theorist or practitioner" (Bakewell, 2023).

So, what is humanism? On the evidence of this review, the 1996 IHEU (now Humanists International) Minimum Statement concerning humanism (i.e. "...*is a democratic and ethical life stance (…) It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality*") provides perhaps the simplest definition. However, it is also clear that exactly what constitutes "democratic and ethical" is open to wide interpretation.

For Professor Werner Falk, in a dialogue with Andrew Farrer in 1948, "...humanism is not a cut-and-dried doctrine: it is a way of thinking of persons, and their place in nature which may take many forms (...) It is a view of Man as the center of the universe, as a creature who can, and does, find his ultimate ends in himself as a natural organism; who , for knowledge, puts his money on his powers of reasoning and observation, who directs his life on his intelligence and will; who won't uncritically submit to authority whether of tradition, or State, or Church; who thinks of Man as the maker of his fortune, thrown on his own resources to shape it or bear with it" (Farrer and Falk, 1989).

For Harold Blackham, the founder of the BHA, humanism is "a concept of man focused upon a programme for humanity". The main features of this human programme are, he writes, "international security, aid, conservation, population control, development and direction of technology, education for autonomy and an open society" (Blackham, 1973). Arguably, Blackham's vision for humanism's broad responsibilities is reflected in the Humanists UK current programme, which campaigns not only against the privileges of established religion and faith schools, but also for women's sexual and reproductive rights including abortion, children's rights (including banning genital mutilation), LGBT rights (including banning conversion 'gay cure' therapy), and for assisted dying.

Evidently, today's humanist organisations with their wide-ranging concerns for freedom and democracy, humanitarianism, environmentalism and even animal welfare, represent an entirely different worldview from the Renaissance humanists or philosophers of ancient Greece. In certain respects, such organisations have become almost indistinguishable from many human rights campaign groups.

Nowadays, many humanist organizations invite people to take a short quiz to determine their degree of humanism (see Figure 16).[65,66,67] Theoretically, asking questions about belief in god, the afterlife, morality etc., gets to the nub of what it means to be a humanist. Or does it?

[65] https://www.humanistsaustralia.org/quiz
[66] https://maltahumanist.org/quiz/
[67] https://www.hffcct.org/are-you-a-humanist

Typically, one of the questions in such a quiz will be 'Is there a god?" (the choice of answers being "yes" or "I see no evidence for any deity"). If one answer 'yes', one's overall score will inevitably be less than 100%. But what does to be 87% or 75% humanist actually mean? As Kurtz (1973) argues, modern humanism cannot in any fair sense of the word apply to someone who believes that God is the source and creator of the universe. Consequently, applying that logic to a modern-day quiz, if the one question the respondent gets 'wrong' concerns belief in a god, the answers to the other questions become largely irrelevant – you are simply not a humanist! However, interpreting the score on the quiz becomes more complicated if one accepts the concept of religious humanism.

Also, on the basis of such a quiz, the Humanists UK organisation promotes the cause of humanism by claiming that "many people are humanists without even knowing it" (see Figure 16). On the one hand this might show that humanism is indeed the default naturalistic approach to life; on the other hand, it might show that humanism is such a broad term that it renders itself meaningless. Arguably, the situation is analogous to a person being called a "green" or an "environmentalist" because he/she supports having clean air, unpolluted rivers and beaches, or supports the protection of nature etc., when the person concerned doesn't use such a label at all.

Figure 16. How Humanist are you?

It is interesting to note that the diverse views, if not confusion, over what exactly defines humanism, are nothing new. Over sixty years ago, the Renaissance scholar Paul Oskar Kristeller remarked that the modern sense of the term humanism puts an emphasis on "human values", and consequently in this sense everybody could be considered a humanist "and the term ceases to be very distinctive" (Kristeller, 1960).

As noted earlier (3.1), modern humanism has made a strong claim that humanist values are rooted in the classical civilizations of Greece, Rome and China. However, the flaw in this argument, as exemplified by Humanists UK's "real 3000-year of humanist thought", is that the years 410-1485 are a complete blank. In other words, during this 'dark' 1000-year period no intellectual thought happened in the West at all, which is of course absurd. As also discussed earlier, there was a vitally important pre-Renaissance period (3.2.1), which demonstrates indisputably "that humanist culture was not born *ex nihilo* in Italy at the end of the fourteenth century" (Revest, 2013).

In contrast to all the above concerns, Jeaneane Fowler argues that humanism is indefinable precisely because of its "particular dynamism" and the acknowledged vagueness of the term "far from being a disadvantage, is an asset" (Fowler, 1999).

3.5.2. Notable humanists, or maybe not

As shown in Figure 5, humanism has a complicated history. Many people have contributed to its development in varying ways and to varying degrees. With regard to modern Humanism, several key individuals such as Felix Adler (2.1), Julian Huxley (2.2), John Dewy and Paul Kurtz (2.3), and Harold Blackham have already been mentioned. Julian Huxley's grandfather was Thomas Henry ("T.H.") Huxley (1825-95) who was a biologist, anthropologist and an important educator.[68] He was perhaps more famous for supporting Darwin's theory of evolution and, according to his grandson, was "a great humanist pioneer" (Bibby, 1960). A prominent freethinker in the 19th century was Charles Bradlaugh who founded the National Secular Society (NSS) in 1866.[69]

As mentioned earlier, in 2021 the Humanists UK organisation launched its Humanist Heritage project to highlight many important individuals in its history. As of 2024, some 200 individuals have been profiled, from the philosopher A.J. Ayer (1910-89) to the largely unknown, but pioneering feminist and civil rights campaigner Zona Vallance (1860-1904).[70] It is worth taking a closer look at some of these individuals because it once again brings into question what exactly must an individual believe (or not), to qualify as a humanist?

The philosopher **Bertrand Russell** (1872-1970) is perhaps a good person with whom to start.[71] He was famous for championing "humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought", for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950.[72] Although he was a lifelong atheist, two of his well-known books *What I Believe* (Russell, 1925) and *Why I am not a Christian* (Russell, 1927) make no mention of humanism. In fact, Russell's philosophy is perhaps best summed by his stated view that: "the good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge" (Russell, 1925, p.28). Ironically, one of his few references to humanism was in a letter in which he declared, "I should not have any inclination to call myself a humanist, as I think, on the whole, that the non-human part of the cosmos is much more interesting and satisfactory than the human part".[73] So, in what sense was he a humanist?

History's most famous scientist **Albert Einstein** (1879-1955) was, according to the Humanist Heritage project, "a passionate humanist".[74] As his two collections of very personal essays (Einstein 1935; 1950) testify, Einstein was undoubtedly someone who was passionate about social justice, freedom and world peace, and passionately against injustice, racism, class divisions and militarism. If those are the criteria for being a humanist, then Einstein met them. But in my view the above description of Einstein sounds more like he was a passionate *humanitarian*. Importantly, what he was also passionate about was of course being a Jew and Jewish ideals. Hence, perhaps not unsurprisingly, his essays (Einstein, *ibid*) make no mention of the term humanism. True, he didn't believe in the Abrahamic god who rewarded and punished his creatures, nor in an afterlife, but he still considered himself "a deeply religious man". So, in what sense was he a humanist?

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[68] https://humanists.uk/humanism/the-humanist-tradition/19th-century-freethinkers/huxley/

[69] Bradlaugh was also Britain's first openly atheist MP (elected in 1880). https://humanists.uk/humanism/the-humanist-tradition/19th-century-freethinkers/charles-bradlaugh/

[70] https://heritage.humanists.uk/types/people/

[71] https://welshicons.org/cymrupedia/famous-welsh/bertrand-russell/

[72] https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/russell/facts/

[73] http://positivists.org/blog/archives/4895

[74] https://heritage.humanists.uk/albert-einstein/

Another famous individual is the American writer **James Baldwin**, who is remembered for his many literary works (about the personal and societal struggles of his time including race, class, and sexuality) and his civil rights activism.

When, in February 2024 as part of Black History Month, Baldwin's life was celebrated in a Google Doodle[75], Humanists UK were quick to declare him the "humanist playwright". However, like many other individuals, Baldwin never said or wrote that he was a humanist or that his campaigning for social justice was motivated by his humanism. Arguably, it was his Christian roots because as a young man he was a minister for a number of years. Later, he moved away from the Church as an institution, but he was far from being secular and gave an address to the World Council of Churches in 1968. Baldwin criticised the role of the Church in contributing to oppression, but he was primarily concerned with humanity, with love and what it means to be human. Christianity, for all its flaws, remained imprinted within him. He sometimes returned to the pulpit and in 1986 (year before he died) he said this:

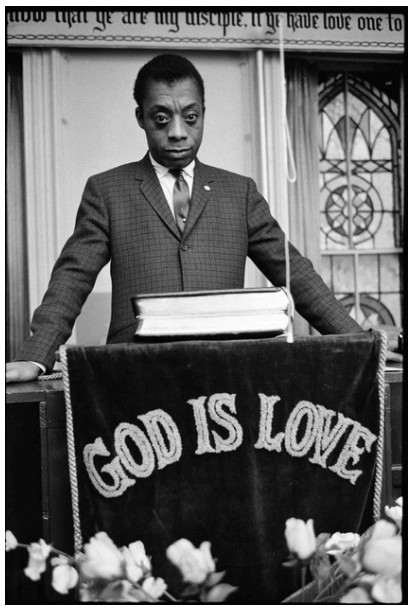

Figure 17. James Baldwin

"*Well, I take my cue from Jesus Christ, really, who told me and told all of us to love each other, clothe the naked, feed the hungry and visit those in prison. If we can't do that, you're not a believer, I don't care what church you go to*". So, in what sense was he a humanist?

As shown in Figure 18 the American author **Lorraine Hansberry** is also celebrated as a Humanist. But again, this is not a label she gave to herself. Hansberry was fundamentally a feminist and civil rights activist fighting against the oppression and discrimination of blacks and women in 1950s America. Her famous play *A Raisin in the Sun* dramatized the issues through a story about the lives of a black working-class family in Chicago. She was the woman who inspired Nina Simone's famous song 'To Be Young, Gifted and Black'. Her writings and journalism brought her under FBI surveillance. Her promising career as a journalist was tragically cut short by her death aged just 34 years.[76] So, in what sense what she a humanist?

Figure 18. Lorraine Hansberry

[75] https://doodles.google/doodle/celebrating-james-baldwin/

[76] She wrote frequently in the newspaper Freedom, founded by famous black actor, singer and civil rights activist Paul Robeson.

On the subject of religion, Hansberry said in an interview, "I don't attack people who are religious at all, as you can tell from the play [*A Raisin in the Sun*]; I rather admire this human quality to make our own crutches as long as we need them. The only thing I am saying is that once we can walk, you know—then drop them" (Nemiroff, 1970). So, was she a humanist?

The Humanist Anthology (Knight, 1961) has been mentioned several times already, and the book is regarded by Humanists UK as part of the indisputable evidence of humanism's ancient roots. However, Knight was aware, in making her selections of text for inclusion, that it was difficult to decide whether certain writers could fairly be classed as Humanist. About Voltaire and Thomas Paine, she says, "they were genuine Deists, and so do not, strictly speaking, qualify for inclusion: yet historically they contributed so much to the growth of Humanism that *it seemed unthinkable to leave them out* [italics added]. About the ancient writers, she declares, "I had no hesitation in including the Epicureans, who held that gods exist but that they are quite unconcerned about human well-being or morals. The Stoics are nearer the borderline; but their ethical code was essentially Humanist, and their cosmology (...) is not incompatible with Humanism, though no Humanist would accept it today" (Knight, *ibid*).

Crucially, although the Anthology supposedly covers some 2,500 years of humanist thinking "from Confucius to Bertrand Russell", only one of the sixty-nine quoted thinkers – Montaigne (1533-92) – is associated with the Renaissance. In other words, from the 2nd to 15th centuries apparently nobody had anything worthwhile to say regarding humanism! The reason for this omission, at least according to Humanists UK, is the malign influence of Christianity that suppressed or silenced all other thinking.[77]

Yet, another perspective on humanism is provided by the **Little Book of Humanism** (Figure 19) that offers, so it is claimed, a collection of "inspiring and thought-provoking words (…) containing universal lessons on finding purpose, meaning and joy in our lives" (Copson and Roberts, 2020). The collection of quotes, poetry and meditations is drawn from some (~100) of history's greatest thinkers, from Greek philosophers to contemporary scientists and writers.

Without any doubt, many of the words are indeed inspiring and thought-provoking, but often they have been very selectively chosen. For example, there are several quotes from each of Russell, Einstein, Baldwin and Hansberry, but none draw attention to the points made above.

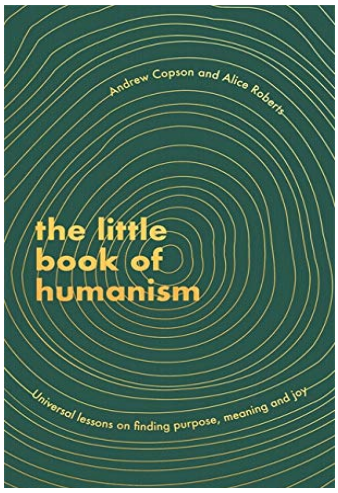

Figure 19. Little Book of Humanism

There is also a quote from Charles Darwin, but it avoids his views on God. While he came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation, he still believed in the existence of God or more specifically, "a First Cause having an intelligent mind (...) and I deserve to be called a Theist" (Darwin, 1958). There are quotes from modern day humanist writers – Harold Blackham, Jeaneane Fowler, Nicolas Walter, Alice Roberts – but they are hardly to be counted amongst "history's greatest thinkers" (no disrespect intended). A quote from the actress Emma Thompson seems out of place. To include the words of Shakespeare is surely as cheeky as it is anachronistic.

[77] See Dark Ages (410-1485) https://heritage.humanists.uk/timeline/

There are other quotes that are simply not thought-provoking at all. For example, Maynard Keynes was undoubtedly a great economist, but his (attributed) words "*When my information changes, I change my mind. What do you do?*" is both trivial and dull.

As noted earlier (Walter, 1997), most of the historical people considered as Humanists did not call themselves Humanists at the time (e.g. Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Voltaire, Diderot, and Thomas Paine); conversely, many of those that did call themselves Humanists are not now considered as Humanists (e.g. Skinner, Dawkins). To conclude this section:

- What the Humanist Heritage Project shows is not only that most of the people who it considers as Humanists did not call themselves by that term, but their philosophical views were far more nuanced than presented. Arguably, some of the profiles misrepresent the person's true views.
- What the Humanist Anthology shows is that many of the so-called Humanists were not outright atheists, many of them were quite comfortable with religion and some were to some degree, even religious.
- What the Little Book of Humanism shows, perhaps unintentionally, is that anybody, from any walk of life, can have an inspiring thought about how to live a fulfilling life. Logically, there's no reason why that shouldn't include people who are religious too. In fact, one could argue that it's irrational *not* to include such people, which given humanism's focus on rationality could be considered supremely ironic.

3.5.3. Humanism and religion

A recurrent theme throughout this essay has been Humanism's relationship to religion, particularly Christianity. For some, the link is clear: Humanism is "another of Christianity's unruly children" (Smart, 1977); Humanism is a "Christian heresy" (Holland, 2022). As noted earlier, the ethics movements of the 19th century grew out of the moral values of Christianity, and the first Humanist Manifesto (1933) was heavily influenced by Unitarian ministers and Universalists. The Manifesto's authors optimistically expected that Humanism would become the "religion of the future". However, critics of religious humanism countered that it was not religious at all because 'religion' had been defined so broadly as to render the term almost meaningless (Meyer, 1982).

Leaving aside the question about Humanism's relationship to Christianity, there is a separate issue concerning whether or not Humanism is a religion. As noted in the Introduction (1.1) Humanism claims not to have any dogma, doctrines or creeds, and nor does it have a founding prophet or teacher. So, at first sight, it cannot be considered a religion in the traditional sense. However, it clearly has important beliefs, and as Professor Ronald Fletcher's put it, "it may be said, fairly I think, that Humanism is a religion of the human spirit (...) Though rejecting all the ultimates, the doctrines, the rituals, the consolations of religion, Humanism – I believe – does not lack the power to inspire" (Fletcher, 1968).

Accepting that Humanism is not a religion, the question arises as to what, if anything, Humanism has to learn from religion. Evidently, many Humanists think that religion is unimportant and has nothing of interest to say, merely a human folly to be dismissed or mocked. But I don't agree with this attitude.

As Professor Ninian Smart put it, "*what moves men, whether it be foolish or wise, justified or unjustified, good or evil, must vitally concern us if we wish to understand men's various responses to life*" (Smart, 1977). As the philosopher and theologian Jens Zimmermann said, Humanism does have religious roots, which Western cultures need to recover – "religion is not the enemy of Humanism", he writes, "but its very source" Zimmermann (2012). Some writers (Saumur, 1982) have argued that Humanism actually needs a religious identity to overcome all the misconceptions about it.

3.5.4. Summing up

In my view, and on a positive note, Humanism has several characteristics and core beliefs that distinguishes it from traditional religions, including Buddhism. These are:

- It is a life-affirming worldview or system of thought that rejects the supernatural and any beliefs in god(s) or an existence after death.
- It is a realistic worldview that human life can be perfectly fulfilling without the need for, and certainly without reverence to, mythological illusions about the origins and destiny of human life in the universe.
- It asserts, given that there is no discernible purpose to the universe and that life on Earth is the only one that humans have, that people must face their problems with their own intellectual and moral resources.
- It asserts that the mainsprings of moral action are people's innate altruistic, co-operative tendencies, their "social instincts".[78] But importantly, to augment or enhance those tendencies and instincts with intuitive insights drawn from elsewhere, especially from religion, is perfectly acceptable.

In my view, and on a negative note, there are some characteristics of modern Humanism that are less welcome. First, there is a tendency to label famous historical persons as 'humanist' without any substantive evidence. In addition to the notable individuals cited above (Russell, Einstein, Baldwin and Hansberry), many others could be mentioned.[79] Second, there is an attitude evident in some humanists that, in terms of their values and moral behaviour, they are not only equal to those who are religiously guided in their lives, but in fact superior to them. Third, there is a tendency to dismiss any criticism of Humanism. For example, the (well-evidenced) claim that ideas of Christianity morality had an important influence on the development of Humanism, is strongly denied and dismissed as "ahistorical".[80] By the same token, the claim that Humanism's roots can be traced back to ancient Greece is strongly promoted when in fact it is not proven (see also 3.1). Such arrogance in humanists to see themselves as the culmination of human history is ironically "as much a product of history as the theology of Luther or the prophecies of Daniel" (Meyer, 1982, p.542).

[78] Darwin, C. (1889) The Descent of Man.

[79] Ramsay McDonald (Labour Prime Minister) dismissed doctrinal religion, but his roots were in Christian Unitarianism, not humanism. Before his career in politics, he was a lay preacher and apparently conducted some 500 services in various Unitarian churches. William Beveridge (of NHS fame) married in a registry office (because he wasn't baptised) but had a church service immediately afterwards conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. He and his wife are buried in a church graveyard.

[80] https://humanists.uk/events/3000-years/

3.6 Conclusions

1. The English words humanism and humanist are relatively recent terms, appearing sporadically in the late 18th and early 19th centuries before wider (and varied) use in the 20th century. The terms were derived from the Italian word *humanista*, which denoted the professional teacher of the *studia humanitatis* or simply the 'humanities'.
2. The 1996 IHEU (now Humanists International) Minimum Statement concerning humanism (i.e. "...*is a democratic and ethical life stance (…) It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality*") seems to provide its simplest definition. However, exactly what constitutes 'ethical' is open to wide interpretation.
3. In 1905 the philosopher and psychologist William James had stated that humanism "suffers badly at present from incomplete definition". Today, much confusion about humanism still remains, so much so that 120 years later, the author Sarah Bakewell remarked that humanism "is a semantic cloud of meanings and implications, none attachable to any particular theorist or practitioner" (Bakewell, 2023).
4. Numerous different types of humanism emerged from the beginning of, and throughout the 20th century, from ethical humanism, scientific humanism, secular humanism, and Christian humanism to Marxist humanism and ecological humanism amongst many others. Such qualifications of the term humanism indicate that it is possible to give a humanistic perspective to any set of human beliefs and practices.
5. Religious humanism sounds like an oxymoron (if humanism is primarily non-theistic), but it reflects a genuine view that Christianity (or Judaism) shares much in common with Humanism in terms of ethics, liberty, equality, responsibility etc.
6. On the evidence of this review, the assertion that qualifications of the term humanism (secular, scientific, evolutionary, ecological, Christian, etc) are based on "false etymological or historical assumptions" (Copson, 2015), is itself demonstrably false.
7. In the 21st century, fewer distinct types of humanism are discernible. Secular humanism remains the most prominent umbrella term, having subsumed ethical and scientific humanism within it. Political and ecological humanism have effectively disappeared, but there are new types such as digital humanism.
8. Modern humanism started in U.S. in the late 19th century when Felix Adler called for the formation of a new ethical organization, where people could meet to discuss "practical duties" to address the social evils in modern society. In 1876, he founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NYSEC), which still exists today.
9. Modern humanists, in particular organisations like Humanists UK, assert that the history of humanism can be traced back to the ancient philosophers of Greece, Rome, and China. Most recently, the claim has been made that "the thread of humanist thinking runs throughout human history", at least for the past 3000 years if not for longer. However, this interpretation of history is highly questionable.
10. Renaissance humanism did not emerge *ex nihilo* in Italy at the end of the 14th century, but was developed from, and ushered in, by the accumulated knowledge of centuries of the Christian past. The very idea of 'medieval' is a humanist invention.

11. In the UK, the Humanists UK organisation has been very successful in raising the profile of humanism. However, several of its publications such as **The Little Book of Humanism** or the **Humanist Heritage project**, reveal (unintentionally) that the philosophical views of many of its celebrated humanists were far more nuanced than presented. The philosopher Bertrand Russell did not even like the label humanist!
12. In the view of some Humanist organisations, many people are humanists without realising it, and only discover this fact after perhaps taking a quiz. On the one hand this might show that humanism is the default naturalistic approach to life; on the other hand, it might show that the term humanism is so broad that it has rendered itself meaningless.
13. A frequent and long-standing criticism of humanism is that there is little difference between it and humanitarianism. Certainly, the wide-ranging ethical campaigns of Humanist organisations for freedom and democracy, women's rights, LGBT rights, animal welfare etc., make them largely indistinguishable from many human rights campaign groups.

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