Humanism is a [philosophical](#) and [ethical](#) stance that emphasizes the value and [agency](#) of [human beings](#), individually and collectively, and generally prefers [critical thinking](#) and evidence ([rationalism](#), [empiricism](#)) over acceptance of dogma or superstition. The meaning of the term *humanism* has fluctuated according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it.[1] Generally, however, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. In modern times, humanist movements are typically aligned with [secularism](#), and today humanism typically refers to a [non-theistic](#) [life stance](#) centred on human agency and looking to science rather than [revelation](#) from a supernatural source to understand the world.[2][3]

Contents

Background

The word "Humanism" is ultimately derived from the Latin concept *[humanitas](#)*, and, like most other words ending in *-ism,* entered English in the nineteenth century. However, historians agree that the concept predates the label invented to describe it, encompassing the various meanings ascribed to *humanitas*, which included both benevolence toward one's fellow humans and the values imparted by *bonae litterae* or humane learning (literally "good letters").

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

Those who have spoken Latin and have used the language correctly do not give to the word *humanitas* the meaning which it is commonly thought to have, namely, what the Greeks call φιλανθρωπία ([philanthropy](#)), signifying a kind of friendly spirit and good-feeling towards all men without distinction; but they gave to *humanitas* the force of the Greek παιδεία ([paideia](#)); that is, what we call *eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artes*, or "education and training in the [liberal arts](#)". Those who earnestly desire and seek after these are most highly humanized. For the desire to pursue of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it, has been granted to humanity alone of all the animals, and for that reason it is termed *humanitas*, or "humanity".[4]

Gellius says that in his day *humanitas* is commonly used as a synonym for philanthropy – or kindness and benevolence toward one's fellow human being. Gellius maintains that this common usage is wrong, and that model writers of Latin, such as Cicero and others, used the word only to mean what we might call "humane" or "polite" learning, or the Greek equivalent [Paideia](#). Gellius became a favorite author in the Italian Renaissance, and, in fifteenth-century Italy, teachers and scholars of philosophy, poetry, and rhetoric were called and called themselves "humanists".[5][6] Modern scholars, however, point out that [Cicero](#) (106 – 43 BCE), who was most responsible for defining and popularizing the term *humanitas*, in fact frequently used the word in both senses, as did his near contemporaries. For Cicero, a lawyer, what most distinguished humans from brutes was speech, which, allied to reason, could (and should) enable them to settle disputes and live together in concord and harmony under the rule of law.[7] Thus *humanitas* included two meanings from the outset and these continue in the modern derivative, *humanism*, which even today can refer to both humanitarian benevolence and to scholarship.[8]

During the [French Revolution](#), and soon after, in Germany (by the [Left Hegelians](#)), *humanism* began to refer to an ethical philosophy centered on humankind, without attention to the [transcendent](#) or [supernatural](#). The designation [Religious Humanism](#) refers to organized groups that sprang up during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is similar to [Protestantism](#), although centered on human needs, interests, and abilities rather than the supernatural.[9] In the Anglophone world, such modern, organized forms of humanism, which are rooted in the 18th-century [Enlightenment](#), have to a considerable extent more or less detached themselves from the historic connection of humanism with [classical learning](#) and the [liberal arts](#).

The first *[Humanist Manifesto](#)* was issued by a conference held at the [University of Chicago](#) in 1933.[10] Signatories included the philosopher [John Dewey](#), but the majority were ministers (chiefly [Unitarian](#)) and [theologians](#). They identified humanism as an ideology that espouses [reason](#), [ethics](#), and [social and economic justice](#), and they called for science to replace [dogma](#) and the [supernatural](#) as the basis of [morality](#) and decision-making.[11][12]

History

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

In 1808 Bavarian educational commissioner Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer coined the term *Humanismus* to describe the new classical curriculum he planned to offer in German secondary schools,[13] and by 1836 the word "humanism" had been absorbed into the English language in this sense. The coinage gained universal acceptance in 1856, when German historian and philologist Georg Voigt used *humanism* to describe Renaissance humanism, the movement that flourished in the Italian Renaissance to revive classical learning, a use which won wide acceptance among historians in many nations, especially Italy.[14]

But in the mid-18th century, during the French Enlightenment, a more ideological use of the term had come into use. In 1765, the author of an anonymous article in a French Enlightenment periodical spoke of "The general love of humanity ... a virtue hitherto quite nameless among us, and which we will venture to call 'humanism', for the time has come to create a word for such a beautiful and necessary thing".[15] The latter part of the 18th and the early 19th centuries saw the creation of numerous grass-roots "philanthropic" and benevolent societies dedicated to human betterment and the spreading of knowledge (some Christian, some not). After the French Revolution, the idea that human virtue could be created by human reason alone independently from traditional religious institutions, attributed by opponents of the Revolution to Enlightenment *philosophes* such as Rousseau, was violently attacked by influential religious and political conservatives, such as Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, as a deification or idolatry of humanity.[16] Humanism began to acquire a negative sense. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the use of the word "humanism" by an English clergyman in 1812 to indicate those who believe in the "mere humanity" (as opposed to the divine nature) of Christ, i.e., Unitarians and Deists.[17] In this polarised atmosphere, in which established ecclesiastical bodies tended to circle the wagons and reflexively oppose political and social reforms like extending the franchise, universal schooling, and the like, liberal reformers and radicals embraced the idea of Humanism as an alternative religion of humanity. The anarchist Proudhon (best known for declaring that "property is theft") used the word "humanism" to describe a "*culte, déification de l'humanité*" ("worship, deification of humanity") and Ernest Renan in *L'avenir de la science: pensées de*

1848 ("The Future of Knowledge: Thoughts on 1848") (1848–49), states: "It is my deep conviction that pure *humanism* will be the religion of the future, that is, the cult of all that pertains to humanity—all of life, sanctified and raised to the level of a moral value."[18]

At about the same time, the word "humanism" as a philosophy centred on humankind (as opposed to institutionalised religion) was also being used in Germany by the so-called Left Hegelians, Arnold Ruge, and Karl Marx, who were critical of the close involvement of the church in the repressive German government. There has been a persistent confusion between the several uses of the terms:[1] philanthropic humanists look to what they consider their antecedents in critical thinking and human-centered philosophy among the Greek philosophers and the great figures of Renaissance history; and scholarly humanists stress the linguistic and cultural disciplines needed to understand and interpret these philosophers and artists.

Predecessors

Ancient South Asia

Human-centered philosophy that rejected the supernatural can be found also circa 1500 BCE in the Lokayata system of Indian philosophy. Nasadiya Sukta, a passage in the Rig Veda, contains one of the first recorded assertion of agnosticism. In the 6th-century BCE, Gautama Buddha expressed, in Pali literature, a skeptical attitude toward the supernatural:[19]

Since neither soul, nor aught belonging to soul, can really and truly exist, the view which holds that this I who am 'world', who am 'soul', shall hereafter live permanent, persisting, unchanging, yea abide eternally: is not this utterly and entirely a foolish doctrine?

Another instance of ancient humanism as an organised system of thought is found in the Gathas of Zarathustra, composed between 1,000 BCE – 600 BCE[20] in Greater Iran. Zarathustra's philosophy in the Gathas lays out a conception of humankind as thinking beings dignified with choice and agency according to the intellect which each receives from Ahura Mazda (God in the form of supreme wisdom). The idea of Ahura Mazda as a non-intervening deistic divine God/Grand Architect of the universe tied with a unique eschatology and ethical system implying that each person is held morally responsible for their choices, made freely in this present life, in the afterlife.[21] The importance placed on thought, action, responsibility, and a non-intervening creator was appealed to by, and inspired a number of, Enlightenment humanist thinkers in Europe such as Voltaire and Montesquieu.

Ancient China

Main article: Chinese philosophy

In China, Yellow Emperor is regarded as the humanistic primogenitor.[*citation needed*] Sage kings such as Yao and Shun are humanistic figures as recorded.[*citation needed*] King Wu of Zhou has the famous saying: "Humanity is the Ling (efficacious essence) of the world (among all)." Among them Duke of Zhou, respected as a founder of Rujia (Confucianism), is especially prominent and

pioneering in humanistic thought. His words were recorded in the *Book of History* as follows (translation):[*citation needed*]

What the people desire, Heaven certainly complies?

Heaven (or "God") is not believable. Our Tao (special term referring to "the way of nature") includes morality (derived from the philosophy of former sage kings and to be continued forward).

In the 6th century BCE, Taoist teacher Lao Tzu espoused a series of naturalistic concepts with some elements of humanistic philosophy. The Silver Rule of Confucianism from *Analects* XV.24, is an example of ethical philosophy based on human values rather than the supernatural. Humanistic thought is also contained in other Confucian classics, e.g., as recorded in Zuo Zhuan, Ji Liang says, "People is the zhu (master, lord, dominance, owner or origin) of gods. So, to sage kings, people first, gods second"; Neishi Guo says, "Gods, clever, righteous and wholehearted, comply with human." Taoist and Confucian secularism contain elements of moral thought devoid of religious authority or deism however they only partly resembled our modern concept of secularism.

Ancient Greece

Main article: Ancient Greek philosophy

6th-century BCE pre-Socratic Greek philosophers Thales of Miletus and Xenophanes of Colophon were the first in the region to attempt to explain the world in terms of human reason rather than myth and tradition, thus can be said to be the first Greek humanists. Thales questioned the notion of anthropomorphic gods and Xenophanes refused to recognise the gods of his time and reserved the divine for the principle of unity in the universe. These Ionian Greeks were the first thinkers to assert that nature is available to be studied separately from the supernatural realm. Anaxagoras brought philosophy and the spirit of rational inquiry from Ionia to Athens. Pericles, the leader of Athens during the period of its greatest glory was an admirer of Anaxagoras. Other influential pre-Socratics or rational philosophers include Protagoras (like Anaxagoras a friend of Pericles), known for his famous dictum "man is the measure of all things" and Democritus, who proposed that matter was composed of atoms. Little of the written work of these early philosophers survives and they are known mainly from fragments and quotations in other writers, principally Plato and Aristotle. The historian Thucydides, noted for his scientific and rational approach to history, is also much admired by later humanists.[22] In the 3rd century BCE, Epicurus became known for his concise phrasing of the problem of evil, lack of belief in the afterlife, and human-centred approaches to achieving eudaimonia. He was also the first Greek philosopher to admit women to his school as a rule.

Medieval Islam

See also: Early Islamic philosophy

Many medieval Muslim thinkers pursued humanistic, rational and scientific discourses in their search for knowledge, meaning and values. A wide range of Islamic writings on love, poetry, history and philosophical theology show that medieval Islamic thought was open to the humanistic ideas of individualism, occasional secularism, skepticism, and liberalism.[23]

According to Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, another reason the Islamic world flourished during the Middle Ages was an early emphasis on freedom of speech, as summarised by al-Hashimi (a cousin of Caliph al-Ma'mun) in the following letter to one of the religious opponents he was attempting to convert through reason:[24]

Bring forward all the arguments you wish and say whatever you please and speak your mind freely. Now that you are safe and free to say whatever you please appoint some arbitrator who will impartially judge between us and lean only towards the truth and be free from the empery of passion, and that arbitrator shall be Reason, whereby God makes us responsible for our own rewards and punishments. Herein I have dealt justly with you and have given you full security and am ready to accept whatever decision Reason may give for me or against me. For "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) and I have only invited you to accept our faith willingly and of your own accord and have pointed out the hideousness of your present belief. Peace be with you and the blessings of God!

According to George Makdisi, certain aspects of Renaissance humanism has its roots in the medieval Islamic world, including the "art of *dictation*, called in Latin, *ars dictaminis*", and "the humanist attitude toward classical language".[25]

Renaissance

Main article: Renaissance humanism

Portrait of Petrarch painted in 1376

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

greatest master was [Cicero](#), whose prose became the model for both learned (Latin) and vernacular (Italian) prose.

Once the language was mastered grammatically it could be used to attain the second stage, eloquence or rhetoric. This art of persuasion [Cicero had held] was not art for its own sake, but the acquisition of the capacity to persuade others – all men and women – to lead the good life. As Petrarch put it, 'it is better to will the good than to know the truth'. Rhetoric thus led to and embraced philosophy. [Leonardo Bruni](#) (c. 1369–1444), the outstanding scholar of the new generation, insisted that it was Petrarch who "opened the way for us to show how to acquire learning", but it was in Bruni's time that the word *umanista* first came into use, and its subjects of study were listed as five: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and history".[26]

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

The basic training of the humanist was to speak well and write (typically, in the form of a letter). One of Petrarch's followers, [Coluccio Salutati](#) (1331–1406) was made chancellor of [Florence](#), "whose interests he defended with his literary skill. The Visconti of Milan claimed that Salutati's pen had done more damage than 'thirty squadrons of Florentine cavalry'".[27]

Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), an early Renaissance humanist, book collector, and reformer of script, who served as papal secretary[28]

Contrary to a still widely held interpretation that originated in Voigt's celebrated contemporary, Jacob Burckhardt,[29] and which was adopted wholeheartedly -especially by modern thinkers calling themselves "humanists" - [30] most specialists today do not characterise Renaissance humanism as a philosophical movement, nor in any way as anti-Christian or even anti-clerical. A modern historian has this to say:

Humanism was not an ideological programme but a body of literary knowledge and linguistic skill based on the "revival of good letters", which was a revival of a late-antique philology and grammar, This is how the word "humanist" was understood by contemporaries, and if scholars would agree to accept the word in this sense rather than in the sense in which it was used in the nineteenth century we might be spared a good deal of useless argument. That humanism had profound social and even political consequences of the life of Italian courts is not to be doubted. But the idea that as a movement it was in some way inimical to the Church, or to the conservative social order in general is one that has been put forward for a century and more without any substantial proof being offered.

The nineteenth-century historian Jacob Burckhardt, in his classic work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, noted as a "curious fact" that some men of the new culture were "men of the strictest piety, or even ascetics". If he had meditated more deeply on the meaning of the careers of such humanists as Abrogio Traversari (1386–1439), the General of the Camaldolese Order, perhaps he would not have gone on to describe humanism in unqualified terms as "pagan", and thus helped precipitate a century of infertile debate about the possible existence of something called "Christian humanism" which ought to be opposed to "pagan humanism".
— *Peter Partner, Renaissance Rome, Portrait of a Society 1500–1559 (University of California Press 1979) pp. 14–15.*

The *umanisti* criticised what they considered the barbarous Latin of the universities, but the revival of the humanities largely did not conflict with the teaching of traditional university subjects, which went on as before.[31]

Nor did the humanists view themselves as in conflict with Christianity. Some, like Salutati, were the Chancellors of Italian cities, but the majority (including Petrarch) were ordained as priests, and many worked as senior officials of the Papal court. Humanist Renaissance popes Nicholas V, Pius II, Sixtus IV, and Leo X wrote books and amassed huge libraries.[32]

In the high Renaissance, in fact, there was a hope that more direct knowledge of the wisdom of antiquity, including the writings of the Church fathers, the earliest known Greek texts of the Christian Gospels, and in some cases even the Jewish Kabbalah, would initiate a harmonious new era of universal agreement.[33] With this end in view, Renaissance Church authorities afforded humanists what in retrospect appears a remarkable degree of freedom of thought.[34][35] One humanist, the Greek Orthodox Platonist Gemistus Pletho (1355–1452), based in Mystras, Greece (but in contact with humanists in Florence, Venice, and Rome) taught a Christianised version of pagan polytheism.[36]

Back to the sources

Portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam

The humanists' close study of Latin literary texts soon enabled them to discern historical differences in the writing styles of different periods. By analogy with what they saw as decline of Latin, they applied the principle of *ad fontes*, or back to the sources, across broad areas of learning, seeking out manuscripts of Patristic literature as well as pagan authors. In 1439, while employed in Naples at the court of Alfonso V of Aragon (at the time engaged in a dispute with the Papal States) the humanist Lorenzo Valla used stylistic textual analysis, now called philology, to prove that the Donation of Constantine, which purported to confer temporal powers on the Pope of Rome, was an 8th-century forgery.[37] For the next 70 years, however, neither Valla nor any of his contemporaries thought to apply the techniques of philology to other controversial manuscripts in this way. Instead, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks in 1453, which brought a flood of Greek Orthodox refugees to Italy, humanist scholars increasingly turned to the study of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, hoping to bridge the differences between the Greek and Roman Churches, and even between Christianity itself and

the non-Christian world.[38] The refugees brought with them Greek manuscripts, not only of Plato and Aristotle, but also of the Christian Gospels, previously unavailable in the Latin West.

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

Consequences

The *ad fontes* principle also had many applications. The re-discovery of ancient manuscripts brought a more profound and accurate knowledge of ancient philosophical schools such as Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism, whose Pagan wisdom the humanists, like the Church fathers of old, tended, at least initially, to consider as deriving from divine revelation and thus adaptable to a life of Christian virtue.[39] The line from a drama of Terence, *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* (or with *nil* for *nihil*), meaning "I am a human being, I think nothing human alien to me",[40] known since antiquity through the endorsement of Saint Augustine, gained renewed currency as epitomising the humanist attitude. The statement, in a play modeled or borrowed from a (now lost) Greek comedy by Menander, may have originated in a lighthearted vein – as a comic rationale for an old man's meddling – but it quickly became a proverb and throughout the ages was quoted with a deeper meaning, by Cicero and Saint Augustine, to name a few, and most notably by Seneca. Richard Bauman writes:

Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto., I am a human being: and I deem nothing pertaining to humanity is foreign to me.

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

There is one short rule that should regulate human relationships. All that you see, both divine and human, is one. We are parts of the same great body. Nature created us from the same source and to the same end. She imbued us with mutual affection and sociability, she taught us to be fair and just, to suffer injury rather than to inflict it. She bid us extend or hands to all in need of help. Let

that well-known line be in our heart and on our lips: *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*." [41]

Better acquaintance with Greek and Roman technical writings also influenced the development of European science (see the history of science in the Renaissance). This was despite what A. C. Crombie (viewing the Renaissance in the 19th-century manner as a chapter in the heroic March of Progress) calls "a backwards-looking admiration for antiquity", in which Platonism stood in opposition to the Aristotelian concentration on the observable properties of the physical world.[42] But Renaissance humanists, who considered themselves as restoring the glory and nobility of antiquity, had no interest in scientific innovation. However, by the mid-to-late 16th century, even the universities, though still dominated by Scholasticism, began to demand that Aristotle be read in accurate texts edited according to the principles of Renaissance philology, thus setting the stage for Galileo's quarrels with the outmoded habits of Scholasticism.

Just as artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci – partaking of the *zeitgeist* though not himself a humanist – advocated study of human anatomy, nature, and weather to enrich Renaissance works of art, so Spanish-born humanist Juan Luis Vives (c. 1493–1540) advocated observation, craft, and practical techniques to improve the formal teaching of Aristotelian philosophy at the universities, helping to free them from the grip of Medieval Scholasticism.[43] Thus, the stage was set for the adoption of an approach to natural philosophy, based on empirical observations and experimentation of the physical universe, making possible the advent of the age of scientific inquiry that followed the Renaissance.[44]

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

were followed everywhere, serving as models for the Protestant Reformers as well as the Jesuits. The humanistic school, animated by the idea that the study of classical languages and literature provided valuable information and intellectual discipline as well as moral standards and a civilised taste for future rulers, leaders, and professionals of its society, flourished without interruption, through many significant changes, until our own century, surviving many religious, political and social revolutions. It has but recently been replaced, though not yet completely, by other more practical and less demanding forms of education.[45]

From Renaissance to modern humanism

Early humanists saw no conflict between reason and their Christian faith (see Christian Humanism). They inveighed against the abuses of the Church, but not against the Church itself, much less against religion. For them, the word "secular" carried no connotations of disbelief – that would come later, in the nineteenth century. In the Renaissance to be secular meant simply to be in the world rather than in a monastery. Petrarch frequently admitted that his brother Gherardo's life as a Carthusian monk was superior to his own (although Petrarch himself was in Minor Orders and was employed by the Church all his life). He hoped that he could do some good by winning earthly glory and praising virtue, inferior though that might be to a life devoted solely to prayer. By embracing a non-theistic philosophic base,[46] however, the methods

of the humanists, combined with their eloquence, would ultimately have a corrosive effect on established authority.

Yet it was from the Renaissance that modern Secular Humanism grew, with the development of an important split between reason and religion. This occurred as the church's complacent authority was exposed in two vital areas. In science, Galileo's support of the Copernican revolution upset the church's adherence to the theories of Aristotle, exposing them as false. In theology, the Dutch scholar Erasmus with his new Greek text showed that the Roman Catholic adherence to Jerome's Vulgate was frequently in error. A tiny wedge was thus forced between reason and authority, as both of them were then understood.[47]

For some, this meant turning back to the Bible as the source of authority instead of the Catholic Church, for others it was a split from theism altogether. This was the main divisive line between the Reformation and the Renaissance,[48] which dealt with the same basic problems, supported the same science based on reason and empirical research, but had a different set of presuppositions (theistic versus naturalistic).[46]

19th and 20th centuries

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

Paine called himself a *theophilanthropist*, a word combining the Greek for "God", "love", and "humanity", and indicating that while he believed in the existence of a creating intelligence in the universe, he entirely rejected the claims made by and for all existing religious doctrines, especially their miraculous, transcendental and salvationist pretensions. The Parisian "Society of Theophilanthropy" which he sponsored, is described by his biographer as "a forerunner of the ethical and humanist societies that proliferated later" ... [Paine's book] the trenchantly witty *Age of Reason* (1793) ... pours scorn on the supernatural pretensions of scripture, combining Voltairean mockery with Paine's own style of taproom ridicule to expose the absurdity of a theology built on a collection of incoherent Levantine folktales.[49]

Davies identifies Paine's *The Age of Reason* as "the link between the two major narratives of what Jean-François Lyotard[50] calls the narrative of legitimation": the rationalism of the 18th-century *Philosophes* and the radical, historically based German 19th-century Biblical criticism of the Hegelians David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach. "The first is political, largely French in inspiration, and projects 'humanity as the hero of liberty'. The second is philosophical, German, seeks the totality and autonomy of knowledge, and stresses *understanding* rather than freedom as the key to human fulfilment and emancipation. The two themes converged and competed in complex ways in the 19th century and beyond, and between them set the boundaries of its various humanisms.[51] *Homo homini deus est* ("The human being is a god to humanity" or "god is nothing [other than] the human being to himself"), Feuerbach had written.[52]

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

the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man ... the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of goodness entirely human (i.e., an exaltation of the human).[53]

Eliot and her circle, who included her companion George Henry Lewes (the biographer of Goethe) and the abolitionist and social theorist Harriet Martineau, were much influenced by the positivism of Auguste Comte, whom Martineau had translated. Comte had proposed an atheistic *culte* founded on human principles – a secular Religion of Humanity (which worshiped the dead, since most humans who have ever lived are dead), complete with holidays and liturgy, modeled on the rituals of what was seen as a discredited and dilapidated Catholicism.[54] Although Comte's English followers, like Eliot and Martineau, for the most part rejected the full gloomy panoply of his system, they liked the idea of a religion of humanity. Comte's austere vision of the universe, his injunction to "*vivre pour altrui*" ("live for others", from which comes the word "altruism"),[55] and his idealisation of women inform the works of Victorian novelists and poets from George Eliot and Matthew Arnold to Thomas Hardy.

The British Humanistic Religious Association was formed as one of the earliest forerunners of contemporary chartered Humanist organisations in 1853 in London. This early group was democratically organised, with male and female members participating in the election of the leadership, and promoted knowledge of the sciences, philosophy, and the arts.[56]

In February 1877, the word was used pejoratively, apparently for the first time in America, to describe Felix Adler. Adler, however, did not embrace the term, and instead coined the name "Ethical Culture" for his new movement – a movement which still exists in the now Humanist-affiliated New York Society for Ethical Culture.[57] In 2008, Ethical Culture Leaders wrote: "Today, the historic identification, Ethical Culture, and the modern description, Ethical Humanism, are used interchangeably."[58]

Active in the early 1920s, F.C.S. Schiller labelled his work "humanism" but for Schiller the term referred to the pragmatist philosophy he shared with William James. In 1929, Charles Francis Potter founded the First Humanist Society of New York whose advisory board included Julian Huxley, John Dewey, Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann. Potter was a minister from the Unitarian tradition and in 1930 he and his wife, Clara Cook Potter, published *Humanism: A New Religion*. Throughout the 1930s, Potter was an advocate of such liberal causes as, women's rights, access to birth control, "civil divorce laws", and an end to capital punishment.[59]

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

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

After World War II, three prominent Humanists became the first directors of major divisions of the United Nations: [Julian Huxley](#) of [UNESCO](#), [Brock Chisholm](#) of the [World Health Organisation](#), and [John Boyd-Orr](#) of the [Food and Agricultural Organisation](#).[60]

In 2004, [American Humanist Association](#), along with other groups representing agnostics, atheists, and other freethinkers, joined to create the [Secular Coalition for America](#) which advocates in Washington, D.C., for [separation of church and state](#) and nationally for the greater acceptance of nontheistic Americans. The Executive Director of Secular Coalition for America is [Sean Faircloth](#), a long-time state legislator from [Maine](#).

Types

Renaissance

Main article: [Renaissance humanism](#)

Renaissance humanism was an activity of cultural and educational reform engaged in by civic and ecclesiastical chancellors, book collectors, educators, and writers, who by the late fifteenth century began to be referred to as *umanisti* – "humanists".[5] It developed during the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and was a response to the challenge of scholastic university education, which was then dominated by Aristotelian philosophy and logic. [Scholasticism](#) focused on preparing men to be doctors, lawyers or professional theologians, and was taught from approved textbooks in logic, natural philosophy, medicine, law and theology.[61] There were important centres of humanism at [Florence](#), [Naples](#), [Rome](#), [Venice](#), [Mantua](#), [Ferrara](#), and [Urbino](#).

Humanists reacted against this utilitarian approach and the narrow pedantry associated with it. They sought to create a citizenry (frequently including women) able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity and thus capable of engaging the civic life of their communities and persuading others to virtuous and prudent actions. This was to be accomplished through the study of the *[studia humanitatis](#)*, today known as the [humanities](#): grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy.[62] As a program to revive the cultural – and particularly the literary – legacy and moral philosophy of classical antiquity, Humanism was a pervasive cultural mode and not the program of a few isolated geniuses like [Rabelais](#) or [Erasmus](#) as is still sometimes popularly believed.[63]

Secular

Main article: [Secular humanism](#)

The Humanist "happy human" logo

Secular humanism is a comprehensive [life stance](#) or [world view](#) which embraces human [reason](#), [metaphysical naturalism](#), [altruistic](#) [morality](#) and [distributive justice](#), and consciously rejects [supernatural](#) claims, [theistic](#) [faith](#) and [religiosity](#), [pseudoscience](#), and [superstition](#).[64][65] It is sometimes referred to as Humanism (with a capital H and no [qualifying](#) adjective).

The [International Humanist and Ethical Union](#) ([IHEU](#)) is the world union of 117 Humanist, rationalist, [irreligious](#), [atheistic](#), [Bright](#), [secular](#), [Ethical Culture](#), and [freethought](#) organisations in 38 countries.[66] The "[Happy Human](#)" is the official symbol of the IHEU as well as being regarded as a universally recognised symbol for secular humanism.

According to the IHEU's bylaw 5.1:[67]

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.

Religious

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Religious humanism is an integration of humanist ethical philosophy with [religious](#) [rituals](#) and beliefs that centre on [human](#) needs, interests, and abilities. Though practitioners of religious humanism did not officially organise under the name of "humanism" until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, non-theistic religions paired with human-centred ethical philosophy have a long history. The [Cult of Reason](#) ([French](#): *Culte de la Raison*) was a religion based on [deism](#) devised during the [French Revolution](#) by [Jacques Hébert](#), [Pierre Gaspard Chaumette](#) and their supporters.[68] In 1793 during the [French Revolution](#), the cathedral [Notre Dame de Paris](#) was turned into a "Temple to Reason" and for a time [Lady Liberty](#) replaced the Virgin Mary on several altars. In the 1850s, [Auguste Comte](#), the Father of Sociology, founded [Positivism](#), a "religion of humanity".[69] One of the earliest forerunners of contemporary chartered humanist organisations was the Humanistic Religious Association formed in 1853 in London.[69] This early group was democratically organised, with male and female members participating in the election

of the leadership and promoted knowledge of the sciences, philosophy, and the arts. The [Ethical Culture](#) movement was founded in 1876. The movement's founder, [Felix Adler](#), a former member of the [Free Religious Association](#), conceived of Ethical Culture as a new religion that would retain the ethical message at the heart of all religions. Ethical Culture was religious in the sense of playing a defining role in people's lives and addressing issues of ultimate concern.

Polemics

Polemics about humanism have sometimes assumed paradoxical twists and turns. Early 20th century critics such as [Ezra Pound](#), [T. E. Hulme](#), and [T. S. Eliot](#) considered humanism to be sentimental "slop" (Hulme)[*[citation needed]*] or "an old bitch gone in the teeth" (Pound)[70] and wanted to go back to a more manly, authoritarian society such as (they believed) existed in the Middle Ages. [Postmodern](#) critics who are self-described [anti-humanists](#), such as [Jean-François Lyotard](#) and [Michel Foucault](#), have asserted that humanism posits an overarching and excessively abstract notion of humanity or universal [human nature](#), which can then be used as a pretext for imperialism and domination of those deemed somehow less than human. "Humanism fabricates the human as much as it fabricates the nonhuman animal", suggests Timothy Laurie, turning the human into what he calls "a placeholder for a range of attributes that have been considered most virtuous among humans (e.g. rationality, altruism), rather than most commonplace (e.g. hunger, anger)".[71] Nevertheless, philosopher [Kate Soper](#)[72] notes that by faulting humanism for falling short of its own benevolent ideals, anti-humanism thus frequently "secretes a humanist rhetoric".[73]

In his book, *Humanism* (1997), Tony Davies calls these critics "humanist anti-humanists". Critics of antihumanism, most notably [Jürgen Habermas](#), counter that while antihumanists may highlight humanism's failure to fulfil its emancipatory ideal, they do not offer an alternative emancipatory project of their own.[74] Others, like the German philosopher [Heidegger](#) considered themselves humanists on the model of the ancient Greeks, but thought humanism applied only to the German "race" and specifically to the Nazis and thus, in Davies' words, were anti-humanist humanists.[75] Such a reading of Heidegger's thought is itself deeply controversial; Heidegger includes his own views and critique of Humanism in Letter On Humanism. Davies acknowledges that after the horrific experiences of the wars of the 20th century "it should no longer be possible to formulate phrases like 'the destiny of man' or the 'triumph of human reason' without an instant consciousness of the folly and brutality they drag behind them". For "it is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of human reason". Yet, he continues, "it would be unwise to simply abandon the ground occupied by the historical humanisms. For one thing humanism remains on many occasions the only available alternative to bigotry and persecution. The freedom to speak and write, to organise and campaign in defence of individual or collective interests, to protest and disobey: all these can only be articulated in humanist terms."[76]

Modern humanists, such as [Corliss Lamont](#) or [Carl Sagan](#), hold that humanity must seek for truth through reason and the best observable evidence and endorse [scientific skepticism](#) and the [scientific method](#). However, they stipulate that decisions about right and wrong must be based on the individual and common good, with no consideration given to metaphysical or supernatural beings. The idea is to engage with what is human.[77]

Contemporary humanism entails a qualified [optimism](#) about the capacity of people, but it does not involve believing that human nature is purely good or that all people can live up to the Humanist ideals without help. If anything, there is recognition that living up to one's potential is hard work and requires the help of others. The ultimate goal is human flourishing; making life better for all humans, and as the most conscious species, also promoting concern for the welfare of other sentient beings and the planet as a whole.[78] The focus is on doing good and living well in the here and now, and leaving the world a better place for those who come after. In 1925, the English mathematician and philosopher [Alfred North Whitehead](#) cautioned: "The prophecy of [Francis Bacon](#) has now been fulfilled; and man, who at times dreamt of himself as a little lower than the angels, has submitted to become the servant and the minister of nature. It still remains to be seen whether the same actor can play both parts".[79]

Humanistic psychology

Main article: [Humanistic psychology](#)

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