

HUMANISM

Humanism is hard to define because it is more a perspective than a specific philosophic position. The Encyclopedia Britannica does us a favor by saying, "In recent years the term humanism has often been used to refer to value systems that emphasize the personal worth of each individual but that do not include a belief in God. Modern Humanism, also called Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism and Democratic Humanism is defined by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as "a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion." Modern Humanism has a dual origin, both secular and religious, and these constitute its sub-categories."

That description indicates the difficulty in offering a succinct definition of humanism. It is a perspective that has evolved from the Enlightenment's belief in reason as the best tool for understanding reality, through the 19th century rejection of supernatural religion, into the 20th century attempt to collect the pieces into one perspective that included both the scientific, rationalistic approach and belief in the human origins of morality and ethics.

Alan Bullock in *The Humanist Tradition in the West* explains "As a rough generalization, Western thought has treated humankind and the cosmos in three distinct modes. The first, the supernatural or the transcendental, has focused on God, treating human beings as a part of the Divine creation. A second, the natural or scientific, has focused on Nature and treats humankind as part of the natural order like other organisms. The third, the humanistic, has focused on humankind, and on human experience as the starting point for human being's knowledge of themselves, of God and of nature."

The humanism of the 20th century started explicitly as a religious movement. The Humanist Manifesto of 1933 starts, "The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience". This religious humanism combined the belief in science and reason while envisioning it as a religion, with the functions, ceremonies, and moral guidance that revealed religions traditionally provided. In the late 20th century the humanist movement came into conflict with conservative Christian groups in the United States and "Secular Humanism" became the most visible element of organized humanism.

The Humanist Way - Edward Ericson

P. XI Definition of Humanism - in the context of this study, (humanism) affirms the freedom, dignity and well-being of human beings as the supreme object of the moral life, without belief in an supernatural power or being. It is committed to the pursuit of the human good as the ultimate value of this life....

Difference between Religious and secular humanism is whether or not a purely nontheistic belief can properly be considered a religion.