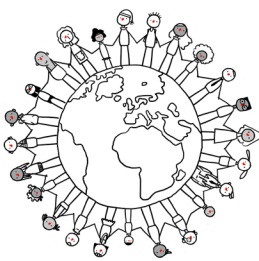


HUMANISMS OF THE WORLD

Humanism derives from a far older tradition than Christianity. The great classical civilisations of China, Greece and Rome were rooted in humanist values; and though these were obscured in Europe during the long night of the Dark Ages they shone forth with renewed brilliance at the Renaissance, and have gathered fresh strength today...

MARGARET KNIGHT

Humanist ideas about morality and meaning in life come from human reason and experience, and are not based on any sacred text. It is no wonder, then, that humanism is such an ancient, and international, approach to living. The humanist philosophy has been present throughout history and across the world, placing emphasis on human goodness, cooperation, and our ability to make the most of this life.



Recognising the humanist traditions around the world not only gives a richer picture of global humanism, it also helps to refute the idea that humanism, like Christianity, was an introduction from the West.

'We see that a reliance on reason and evidence to explain the universe, a commitment to actively giving meaning and significance to this one human life, and a deep belief in the equal dignity of every human being are all ideas with a long and global heritage. Today, there are humanist organizations across the world promoting these humanist ideas. They don't belong to any tribe, nation, or race but are a true human tradition.'

HUMANISTS INTERNATIONAL

CHARVAKA (INDIA)

'Morality is natural, it is a social convention and convenience, not a divine command... The purpose of life is to live; and the only wisdom is happiness.'

Charvaka (also known as Lokayata, or 'Worldly Ones' in Sanskrit) was an ancient school of thought, which rejected the commonly accepted ideas of reincarnation and karma - both of which rested on a belief that the soul was separate from the body, and could survive after death. Instead, Charvakas believed in materialism: the idea that only what could be physically experienced in the material world was real. The philosophy is believed to date from as early as 600 BCE, but drew on a tradition of rationalism in India which already existed.

Evidence for the beliefs of the Charvakas mostly survives because of attempts to challenge their ideas by later religious writers. Some of these thought that Charvaka would lead to a life of immorality. Although Charvakas no longer existed by the Middle Ages, they continued to influence humanist thought in India.

M.N. Roy, creator of the Radical Humanist Movement in India and a founding member of Humanists International, described the Charvakas as 'not mere nihilists, agnostics and skeptics' but thinkers who 'developed an elaborate system of positive philosophical thought'.



CONFUCIANISM (CHINA)

Confucianism is one of the oldest systems of philosophy in the world, dating back to the ideas of Confucius himself, who was born 551 BCE in eastern China. His teachings focused on ethical living, and the idea that anyone (not just people born rich or noble) could be good, kind, and just. Confucius placed the responsibility for maintaining harmony in the world primarily on human beings, and advocated a golden rule: 'Do not do to others what you would not like yourself'.

A loyal and influential follower of Confucius was Meng-tzu (or Mencius), c. 371-289 BCE. Mencius taught that all human beings were inherently

good, but he understood the effect of other factors on how easy (or hard) it was for them to live virtuous lives. Therefore, Mencius believed that people needed to practise goodness, and to work to build an environment which might help others to be good.

“All humans have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others... When someone sees a child about to fall into a well, they will all experience a feeling of alarm and distress... to be without this compassion is not human.”



MENG-TZU

EPICUREANISM (GREECE)

“There is nothing to fear from Gods, nothing awaiting us in death; good can be obtained, evil fortune can be endured.”

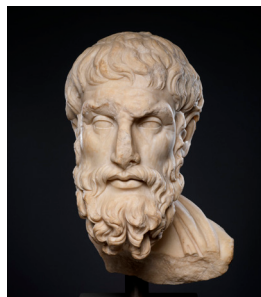
THE FOURFOLD EPICUREAN PRESCRIPTION

Epicureanism was an early humanist philosophy, which set happiness as the ultimate goal of life, and made human beings responsible for achieving and maintaining it. It grew from the ideas of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE), who founded a school of philosophy in Athens - which was notable for being the first to accept women.

Epicurus believed that fears of punishment from gods, and worries about an afterlife, hampered human happiness. Instead, he argued that it was impossible to know anything about gods, and if they existed, they would be uninterested in human affairs. Therefore, it was the responsibility of human beings to live good lives, and promote happiness for themselves and each other. Friendship, moderation, and cooperation were at the core of the Epicurean philosophy, which continued to be spread by Roman writers like Cicero and Lucretius.

“Friendship goes dancing round the world proclaiming to us all to awake to the praises of a happy life.”

EPICURUS,
FRAGMENTS



UBUNTU (AFRICA)

“Ubuntu has its roots in humanist African philosophy, where the idea of community is one of the building blocks of society. Ubuntu is that nebulous concept of common humanity, oneness: humanity, you and me both.”

NKEM IFEJIKA

Ubuntu is a Nguni word (from southern Africa) implying compassion, humanity, and the idea that we are 'human' because of our relationship to others. Ethel Maqeda, a writer originally from Zimbabwe, has written of the origin of ubuntu in the phrase: "‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ (a person is only a person through and because of other people).’ She says, ‘In other words, we can only be fully human when we acknowledge, accept, appreciate and nurture other people’s humanity. In practice, Ubuntu fosters group solidarity, compassion and respect for others and encourages and enables individuals to continually expand their circle of humanity to embrace and celebrate diversity... Ubuntu is about the common good of society, with humanness as an essential element of human growth.’

Ubuntu has its origins in the first half of the 19th century, but non-supernatural philosophies have long been present in Africa. Lola Tinubu, one of the founders of the Association of Black Humanists, has said that the 'African traditional worldview is centred more on the human than on Gods'. Another example is the Yoruba saying from western Nigeria: 'iwa lesin' or 'your character is your religion.'