

Humanism and Rooted Diversity

Two foci of resistance to late modernity

By MARK WEGIERSKI

The ideal of humanism is, world historically speaking, mainly centered in Western civilization (although analogies may be found, e.g., in the Confucian ethic). It is also a possible counter-ethic to the decadence now overwhelming the West.

Humanism, especially when qualified as “secular” humanism, is often pejoratively contrasted with theism, but need not be. I do not intend my use of the term to imply atheism, anticlericalism, or irreligion. However, I do sympathize with the gentle skepticism concerning the dogmatic truth-claims of conflicting religions and denominations that the term also often implies: e.g., a genuine humanist could never sympathize with the raging sectarianism that led to the Thirty Years’ War. At the same time, the humanist scholar recognizes that current-day late modernity in the West is probably at the furthest possible remove from any danger of *Christian* sectarianism.

The humanist scholar of Christian background has no trouble participating in or silently tolerating Christian public rituals, regardless of his own beliefs. A humanist of non-Christian background should also tolerate such rituals, as they are part of the history and tradition of Western countries. At the same time, fanatical “separation of Church and State,” such as has been imposed on America and Canada by judicial fiat, is distasteful to a true humanist. Trying to expunge Christianity from the public square is as unnatural as burning heretics at the stake. Christianity is the professed religion of an overwhelming majority of Americans and Canadians, and to try to carry on politics and the education of the young as if Christianity never existed is a chimerical exercise. In more pointed terms, it is the programmatic devalourization of an enormous part of American and Canadian tradition, history, politics, art, architecture, and culture. The fanatical assault on

the Christian religion in these countries today does not represent tolerance; it is actually an attack on “live-and-let-live” politics.

Humanism implies the study of the liberal arts. The word “liberal” in this context is to be understood by contrast with “servile.” Liberal arts are the studies befitting free men and women, those which enable them to exercise freedom responsibly, as citizens and possibly officeholders in the *res publica*. They equip a person to practice justice as defined by Aristotle: “treating equals equally, and unequals unequally.” The term liberal also implies the teaching and cultivation of character, patriotism, and good citizenship, without involving any denial of the necessity for social hierarchy.

Although many people can study the liberal arts at a basic level, for most people there are obstacles to carrying such study to an advanced level. First of all, many human beings are better fitted by ability or temperament for so-called servile or mechanical studies (which today include many prestigious professions). Secondly, many persons are “slaves” of various character defects, which leave them incapable of the commitment required for intense study. Finally, there is the issue of native intelligence. The proper humanistic response to differences in native abilities is this: “*all* can become decent persons and patriotic citizens by a wide variety of paths, few of which require advanced studies at the university level.”

European and European-derived societies are under challenge today as never before in their history. We are under threat from economism, globalization, and the flooding of the world by scientism and the technological outlook, which corrodes traditional societies in the West and elsewhere. They promote a crisis of morality and an efflorescence of polymorphous perversity in urban centers, compounded by an unwillingness to punish real criminals for real crimes. They also contribute to our cultural crisis: the virtual annihilation of the cultures of Western national majorities, and the triumph of minoritarian interests.

At the same time, the soft totalitarianism of European societies precludes the raising of defenses

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against rapidly approaching dangers. Without reflective resistance to the prevalent forces of late modernity, popular counter-tendencies are likely to atrophy. The continuation of any cultural, intellectual, and academic endeavour free of contemporary ideological strictures is under severe threat. If current trends continue unopposed, the life of the mind and spirit in such a society will become a road without an exit, a barren wasteland.

Indeed, the central problem of the West could be seen as how to preserve a truly humanitarian and compassionate outlook, maintaining a proper level of concern for all human beings without destroying the cultures of European national majorities. One thing this means is opposing the triumph of minoritarianist outlooks and power-centers.

One may question whether sufficient spiritual and intellectual resources can be summoned in defense of European societies today. A few decades hence, if some kind of shake-up does not occur — if current trends continue unopposed — one may well expect cultural and academic life in the West to become unbearably stifling, consisting of little more than the repetition of catchwords and emotive sloganeering like the “Newspeak” Orwell evoked in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. One can probably expect a devolution of the social and economic situation to what has been called “Brazilification” — extreme contrasts of wealth and poverty; environmental degradation; endemic violence and corruption; and the virtual disappearance of the white middle and working class, as well as of heartland America and rural Canada (even as a super-rich, hyper-decadent, ultraliberal “white tip” remains in place). Perhaps the best hope of Europeans may eventually reside in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Whatever the future, humanism and humanistic study can always provide a redemptory focus for Western civilization. The unreflective instincts of the European majority populations and the remnants of Christian religious orthodoxy will probably not be enough to mount a sustained counter-offensive without such study.

Science cannot tell us very much about how to live, while the social sciences have done little more than to put a scientific gloss on the opinions of social scientists. True philosophy, however, does not shirk the task of examining better and worse ways to live, or the complex relation between universal truth and human particularity. In the post-Rousseauian, post-Herderian, and post-Nietzschean age, the likeliest solution to the tangled problem of the universal vs. the particular, is what I call “rooted diversity.” This viewpoint may be summarized by paraphrasing Canadian philosopher

George Great: it is *only* by loving what is ours that we can come to understand the universal.

Rooted diversity understands that nations and religions must be cherished, that it is entirely normal to love our own more than another, and that such feelings of identification with nation and religion cannot be entirely formal and cool. We must defend our own nation and religion as well as opposing fanaticism in their name. A politics of unremitting self-loathing by Western, Christian, heterosexual males cannot lead to any honest relationship with “the Other”; it merely inverts the dominant and subordinate roles. Our aim should be to move toward a more human dialectic, relationship, and interplay.

Despite its recognition of the importance of Christian tradition in European and European-derived countries, humanism is on guard against sectarianism and intellectual simplifications of the respective Christian denominations, e.g., where they depart from a healthy sense of national self-identity, whether by viciously attacking other denominations or religions, or by weakening the nation by too eagerly adopting the outlooks of other denominations or religions.

The politics of humanism is invariably that of the *patria* and *res publica*, a flexible concept which can accommodate, for example, the monarchical and parliamentary patriotism of Britain or Canada, the republican nationalism of Poland, heavily mixed with Roman Catholicism, or the republicanism of the United States based on American citizenship and some elements of Christianity.

The proper nourishing of sizeable, effective, nationally minded, humanistic elites to represent the majority populations of the European and European-descended nations is probably the most important civilizational goal the West could set for itself right now. Scientific, technological, and economic successes will count for little if these majority groups lack intellectual defenders. The reluctance of the business classes to support humanistic endeavors is typical. There appears to be real confusion concerning priorities in current-day society, when vast amounts of money can be found for the most trivial or even harmful things, while humane studies are being starved.

Where else will the future defenders of the West come from? For alongside the ecological and population crises of the planet acknowledged by most commentators, we face a greater moral and cultural crisis. If it is to be surmounted, it will be in no small part because of humanism and the acceptance of rooted diversity. ■