

From:

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Humanism in Intercultural Perspective
Experiences and Expectations

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This book is a breakthrough in illuminating humanism. For the first time it is presented in an intercultural perspective. It introduces Chinese, Indian, African, Islamic, and Western traditions into the intercultural discussion about basic issues of understanding the human world. By this means it recognizes different disciplinary perspectives: history, philosophy as well as religious, literary and gender studies. Special emphasis is put on the controversial relationship between humanism and religion. This complex network of argumentations is an answer to the challenge of cultural orientation at the age of globalization. Humanism is brought to life as a synthesis of transcultural values and a mutual and critical recognition of cultural differences.

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Content

| | |
|---|----|
| JÖRN RÜSEN Foreword | 9 |
| JÖRN RÜSEN Introduction. Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Ideas on a New Cultural Orientation | 11 |
| Part I: The Challenge of Globalization | |
| DIPESH CHAKRABARTY Humanism in a Global World | 23 |
| ROMILA THAPAR Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Some Thoughts | 37 |
| Part II: The Variety of Cultures | |
| YUNQUAN CHEN The Spirit of Renwen (人文 “Humanism”) in the Traditional Culture of China | 49 |
| SURENDRA MUNSHI Humanism in Indian Thought | 57 |
| ELÍSIO MACAMO Africa and Humanism | 65 |
| BERNARD C. LATEGAN Exclusion and Inclusion in the Quest for a “New” Humanism: A Perspective from Africa | 79 |

| | |
|--|----|
| MUHAMMAD ARKOUN | |
| A Return to the Question of Humanism in Islamic Contexts | 91 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| FRIEDRICH WILHELM GRAF | |
| What is Humanism? My Western Response | 111 |

Part III: Religious Dimensions

| | |
|--|-----|
| VOLKHARD KRECH | |
| Ideology und Utopia: Some Brief Remarks on the Relation between Religion and Humanism | 121 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| JONATHAN WEBBER | |
| New Wine in Old Bottles? Reflections on the Scope for a Jewish Voice in a Humanist Intercultural Dialogue | 127 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| GEORG ESSEN | |
| “Who Observes Religions?”Negotiating Faith, Reason and the Idea of Humanism in an “Era of Terrorism” | 145 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| HASSAN HANAFI | |
| Man in the Light of God: An Essay on Humanism in Islam | 157 |

Part IV: Perspectives of Interpretation

| | |
|---|-----|
| GIANNA POMATA | |
| Feminism as Integral to the History of Humanism | 167 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| ERHARD RECKWITZ | |
| Humanism and the Literary Imagination | 177 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| BO STRÅTH | |
| Humanism and the Social: An Unclarified Relationship | 189 |

Part V: Towards the Future

| | |
|--|-----|
| JÜRGEN STRAUB | |
| Intercultural Competence: A Humanistic Perspective | 199 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| LONGXI ZHANG | |
| Humanism yet Once More: A View from the Other Side | 225 |

HENNER LAASS

Logocentrism and beyond: Some Concluding Remarks 233

Bibliography 249

Index of Names 267

Notes on the Contributors 271

Foreword

JÖRN RÜSEN

This book is based on the presentations and discussions of a conference on “Humanism in the Era of Globalization, an Intercultural Dialogue on Culture, Humanity, and Values,” which took place from July 6th till 8th 2006 in Essen. The conference was the ceremonial opening of an international research project with the same title as the conference. This project is run by the Institute of Advanced Study in the Humanities (Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut - KWI) in Essen (Germany) in close cooperation with the neighbouring universities of Bochum, Dortmund, and Duisburg-Essen. It is sponsored by the Stiftung Mercator, Essen.

As the head of the project I would like to express my gratitude to different persons and institutions. First of all I would like to thank Rüdiger Frohn, chair of the board of the Stiftung Mercator, for his interest in our work, his constructive criticism and generous advice. With his rich experience in politics and his interest in basic questions of cultural orientation and its practical realization he has stimulated the work of the project from its very beginning. Additionally, the insistence of the Stiftung Mercator to cooperate with the three Ruhr-Universities, has lead to new ways of cooperation across institutional borders and has set a paradigm of the further work of the KWI.

Without the support of the crew of the KWI in Essen the project would not have effectively run. A special thank goes to Norbert Jegelka, its chief administrator, for his competence in planning and management. I am grateful to Irmtraud Seebold and Martin Gieselmann for their engagement in managing the project. Together with Norbert Jegelka they civilized my anti-bureaucratic attitudes and academic anarchism. They mastered the difficulties of bringing together and integrating a group of very different researchers and of giving their common work an effective form. Furthermore, they prepared and realized the very different activities of the project like conferences, workshops, a post-graduate school, visiting scholars, cooperation with schools and institutes of political education etc.

I would like to express my thanks to the contributors for their texts and their willingness to follow my quests for shaping them into the framework of this book. I am grateful to Henner Laass who as my assistant editor

contributed to this book with a lot of conducive criticisms and ideas, Angelika Wulff for her intensive work on the manuscripts and to Shari Gilbertsen for her inestimable help in correcting the language of the papers. Special thanks are owed to the Stiftung für Kulturwissenschaft (Essen) for their appreciation of the work of the humanism-project and their decision to support the publication of the book.

Finally, I would like to thank my partners all over the world who joined my enthusiasm for a new humanism and gave it the necessary openness and flexibility: Chen Qineng and Jiang Peng from the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences in Beijing, Huang Chun-Chieh from the Institute of Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the National Taiwan University in Taipei, Bernhard Lategan from the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study in South Africa, Surendra Munshi and Ranjan Ghosh from India, Masayuki Sato from Japan, Johann Tempelhoff from South Africa, Oliver Kozlarek from Mexico, and many others.

I hope that with the engagement of its many co-operators the project will substantially contribute to an intercultural communication, – not only on the level of academic discourse – which will confirm and develop the validity of human dignity across and within different traditions and life forms all over the world.

Essen, July 2009

Jörn Rüsen

Introduction.

Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Ideas on a New Cultural Orientation

JÖRN RÜSEN

The purpose of study is nothing but humanity. Humanity is the virtue by which Heaven participates in us.

*Cui Shu*¹

1. A New Kind of Humanism is Necessary

One of the most important intellectual tasks of the present is the development of a new kind of humanism. Current global conflicts in politics, economics, culture and religion call out strongly for defining and strengthening a global culture of values and humanity. Fundamentalism and terrorism, as well as hunger, poverty and misery in many parts of the world provide quite sufficient evidence for the necessity of this. The absence of equilibrium in world economic structures, the insufficient will to implement the principles of good governance on the part of many of the world's regimes plus powerful societal tensions, require new and better responses to the call for a new order; but they also necessitate the constructive dialogical and intercultural establishment of a value system before this order can be accepted as either new, or indeed for that matter, constructive. It is equally necessary to evolve an understanding of humankind in the era of globalization which, while inclusive of all civilizations, will at the same time emphasize their particularity and diversity. This understanding should impart normative elements of cultural orientation to all arenas of intercultural encounter and communication. Since we as human beings share a common nature and as this nature includes the mental formations of culture – giving sense and

1 | Cui Shu: Lun Yu Yu Shuo. Quoted in German by Quirin 1994: 389.

meaning to human life – and because this self-awareness (“humanness”) includes the normative elements of our lives as they are practiced, there is a chance to come to an agreement on such a comprehensive view of cultural orientation without sacrificing either our identities or alterities.

All cultural traditions include humanistic elements. “Humanistic” simply means that the fact of being a human being ascribes to every one of us a worthiness in relationship both to others and to the self. But these traditional elements are not sufficient to the challenges involved in grafting valid universal norms onto the globalization process; for even if they have a universalistic dimension their validity is pre-eminently limited to the dimension of that culture within which these particular norms have been developed. At the very least, people of other cultures with different traditions would hesitate to accept them within a global value system without critical reflexion.

After the traumatic events of the 20th century, traditional European humanism, with its obvious ethnocentric features had to undergo fundamental criticism as revealed in the light of post-modernism and post-colonialism. In the West it has mostly been replaced by a form of cultural relativism that fails to solve the urgent problems of intercultural communication which have become evident since the September 11 incident.

In the face of the challenge posed by globalization, the cultural orientation of the present is faced with two distinctive options: one would be (and is fast becoming) a clash of civilizations; the other could be the development of a new trans-cultural ethos of mutual recognition based on the shared norms of a dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

In western civilization humanism has always been a central issue within the humanities; but having lost a considerable amount of credibility in the wake of the intense self-critiquing undertaken on the part of western post-modern and post-colonial theorists, it now plays only an insignificant role if one does not entertain the idea of a return to such a style of non-viable traditionalism in the future. This situation is highly problematic, as there are pressing requirements calling for newly viable concepts of what it means to be human. And only by way of the humanities and social sciences, and the hope that their rational arguments will lead to a general agreement, can such concepts be developed.

2. The Role of a New Humanism in the Clash of Civilizations

The present intercultural debate is marked by a concept of civilization that is closely related to separate cultural traditions and places world civilizations in merely superficial relationships with one another; and being regarded by the followers of Spengler and Toynbee to be independent and autonomous constructions of human world concepts and the orientation of human

action. Their concepts of Man are characterized by differences which can't be synthesized into unity.

All world civilizations have developed universalistic concepts of humankind, i.e. concepts that claim to be valid for all people. These however, reveal culturally specific traits and are thereby different. On the level of conceptual discourse, the relation between different world civilizations can be defined as a contest of universalistic concepts of humanity – these concepts often being arrayed against each other: The way in which non-European nations in particular (China, India, Japan, Africa, parts of Latin America) are gaining a new-found self-confidence to enter into the intellectual trends that globalization represents, is a clear move against the historically dominant West. There is also a tendency on the part of these societies to define and highlight themselves against the West in cultural terms, a tendency which is encouraged by the dominant currents throughout western intellectual discourse: The West is engaging in an on-going painful self-critique in which it is divesting itself of its own traditional universalistic humanism and is instead cultivating a form of cultural relativism that has abandoned these outmoded universalistic standards of humanity.

This surrendering by the West goes along with the relativization of those insights within the humanities claiming to be of universal validity; and it goes along with their losing the function of giving orientation to society. Together with the anti-western attitude of many non-European countries in their identity building process, both tendencies create a tense atmosphere. There is still no general concept of communication that different cultural traditions and claims for the recognition of one's own cultural identity can resort to.

Can differences of interrelationship be recognized on the basis of a new concept of humanity? The global situation of intercultural discourse calls for a culture where these differences can be recognized. The tendency towards fundamentalism in world religions more than sufficiently proves this need.

In their basically oppositional development, forms of cultural identity have developed concepts of humanity that go beyond ethnic, national, or even cultural limits. Instead of using this universalism against each other, it would be more sensible to integrate it into a general concept of humanity where cultural differences are conceptualized as internal differentiations of a universal idea of humankind. In theory, the clash of civilizations in the sense of a clash of different cultural identities would thus be overcome and new forms of discursive understanding would be made possible.

Such a project is not realized through minor academic debates but needs to be drafted, tried out and convincingly developed over a long process of critical dialogue between representatives of different civilizations.

3. New Humanism and Global Economics²

It is often held that cultural convergence is a major factor of globalization. To those who believe in this line of reasoning it is a forgone conclusion that certain institutions such as capital markets are organized according to best practice and thus prevail in the global competition due to their advanced efficiency and growth. A well-known example is intellectual property rights. Under the guidance of the WTO there is a worldwide process of formalized homogenization under way which has resulted in conflicts. Countries such as China are forced to take action against their own internal culturally divergent attitudes towards intellectual property rights. But it is still an open question as to whether or not such a convergence is in fact a necessity. As developments in the software industry in recent years have shown, intellectual property rights might become irrelevant in the light of technological advances overtaking this industry. The open source paradigm then becomes a cultural factor per se that changes the criteria for cultural divergence and convergence. Technology as a product of human culture becomes a factor of cultural divergence in the realm of national economies.

This is but one example showing that the evolution of market forces need and constantly creates diversity. On the level of national economies there is also no discernible convergence in connection to a certain institutional standard: Although Scandinavian countries hold top positions on the World Competitiveness Index, they are not found among the countries with highly liberalized markets; China, a socialist state, has an economic system that relies on Manchester Capitalism. At the same time the cultural foundation underpinning any national economic system becomes more and more transparent. The USA as an “institutional benchmark” witnesses cultural conflicts for which Christian revivalism has become a major driving force. And on the level of business there are to be found ongoing processes of comparable complexity: More and more globally active corporations realize that the shifting cultural sands on which their regional units are built do not generate only problems, but rather can be seen as a source of creativity. New disciplines such as “diversity management” are bringing this multiplicity to the level of the individual.

These historical changes sum up the quandary faced by those who would integrate humanism into economic policy. It is obvious that the market is not a means to fulfill its own ends but rather receives its objectives from forces acting from outside. However, more often than not economic factors place restrictions on the freedom of people to choose their aims. This is why a debate on humanism as it pertains to national economies is inevitable at this point. In addition humanisms’ role in the global marketplace transcends the old ideological conflicts such as that between capitalism and socialism. It is a fact that the dynamics of (“free market”) capitalism has contributed to the

2 | I am grateful to Prof. Carsten Herrmann-Pillath for his support in applying the idea of a new humanism to economics.

prosperity of ever increasing numbers of people. Nevertheless the questions on the “why” and “what for” of that prosperity have to be raised. Even many economists today believe that the deeper roots of economic dynamics are to be found outside the market itself. Key concepts such as social capital point at the cultural bedrock of economic systems – though culture itself is not an economic commodity. Instead, culture gains strength by being disseminated through becoming a “public commodity” that transcends privately owned interests. Humanism and its leavening role in the world’s economies mark a continuing exploration of the characteristics and risks of free market capitalism.

The driving force behind modern economic policy stems from a historic change: that of a “moral economy” into market economics; the rules of the market having become superior to the principles of social responsibility. In the language of the Communist Manifesto this tendency is put into these words:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left no other nexus between people than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade.³

Modern capitalism can be understood as an amoral economic system. Today one can observe a re-moralization: On the level of macro-economics we can observe the world-wide efforts to frame a market economy into sets of political and social rules which might tame its dynamics for the benefit of the majority of the worlds’ population. Economic policies have always been politically and socially contextualized; but in the globalization process have transgressed all national borders, and it seems that there is no alternative trans-national influence conciliatory to the meta-economic needs of the people whose lives are radically conditioned by the forces of the market. But there is a growing awareness that an economic system which follows exclusively its own rules can become self destructive, and according to this criticism a world-wide effort has emerged to overcome this “market fundamentalism” (George Soros) in favour of a “capitalism with a human face.”⁴ On the level of business administration the growing importance of “corporate social responsibility” as a factor of practical activity corresponds to this tendency. Following from

3 | <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html> [24.08.2007]; the German text in: Marx/Engels 1972: 464 ff.

4 | The “Global Marshall Plan Initiative” is a paradigmatic example. Cf. Radermacher 2004.

this, humanism can become a cultural factor which might open up new perspectives of economic practice within the globalization process.

4. The New Humanism and Religion

Religion has always played an important role in the processes of the construction of human cultural identities. Today religion seems to be a worrisome obstacle to the development of a value system universal enough to have any cross-cultural relevance. Religious fundamentalism aggressively opposes any attempt to establish a universalistic humanism as a leading principle of understanding cultural diversity, since the humanist outlook very often goes along with a secular way of life. But even beyond this opposition between religion and secularism, religion remains a problem of intercultural communication. At the very moment when religious belief combines with universal truth-claims it negates all other belief systems as untrue, thus invalidating any differing religious views as to the nature of truth. The only solution seems to be to overcome the specific and peculiar forms of religious zealotry in favour of a common universalistic morality or system of ethics (Küng 1995). But religion cannot be reduced to or even dissolved into morality. It remains, alongside its own logic, within the domain of cultural orientation. Does this logic inevitably lead to exclusion and negation: Might it not, on the strength of universalistic truth claims, reconsider its own position? If this type of universalism achieves a humanistic quality, it may change its relationship to other universalisms; from that of exclusiveness to a universal inclusiveness.

5. The Challenges Posed by Dehumanization

The most radical challenge to a new humanism is the traumatic historical experience of crimes against humanity. These crimes have disfigured the features of human history with many large, cancerous dark spots, radically questioning any humanistic notions of history fashionable with modern historical thinking since the Enlightenment and its follower Historicism and with the many forms of “new history” in the 20th and 21st century. There are a lot of moral arguments in favour of creating a new humanism in order to solve the problem of intercultural communication within the modern globalized agenda. But how valid is morality if it does not correspond to history? If the impression of inhumanity prevails, is humanism only a utopian vision, unable to address the real problems of human existence? The Holocaust is a paradigm for this challenging inhumanity, representative in its most radical formulation. The answer must come in the form of a “new” humanism which interweaves anthropological insights into the fragility and fallibility of human life with the development of new categories of historical interpretation while also stressing the impact that suffering has on human potential and development and changing traditional historical

interpretive criteria into much more open-ended ones (see Rösen 2008b: 191-200).

Finally, another challenge to humanism must be stressed: the growing power of concepts of naturalism in current intellectual life. By speaking of “humanity” as a principle of human self-understanding and as a guideline for human life-in-practice, humanism emphasizes the cultural qualities of civilized people as essentially different from being in a state of nature, let alone from all other species in the visible world. Herder expressed this trans-natural “nature” of humankind by addressing his fellow men as *Freigelassene der Schöpfung* (released slaves of the creation) (Herder 2002, vol. III/1: 135). This has to be understood as man liberated from the *limitations* of nature, from the submission to the constraints of living by its laws. Man has brought about another order of existence with new laws, namely the laws of reason and morality, the commitment to which defines the humanity of humans. Different from all other natural beings which were thrown into a pre-determined order of existence, human beings have created this order themselves, facilitated by their competence in generating the sense-making interpretive criteria of their lives for themselves. Realizing this competency in the multiplicity of culture, human life has to be understood as a process of cultivating one’s own unique character. Humanity is itself a process by which self-empowerment goes beyond all natural limits and leads us into the world of culture – since culture is the opposite of nature. It is constituted by a set of values and norms which have to be ascribed to every single member of the human race. This set of values has changed in the course of time, but some common features nevertheless can be enumerated: The idea of equality, the entitlement to basic rights, social cohesion as a consequence of the fragility of human life, and the general moral rule that these values and norms which a person or social group feels entitled to or committed to should be valid for each and every other person and social group as well.

It is this emphasis on a normative concept of the “cultural nature of man” which puts humanism in stark contrast and opposition to all movements aimed toward “naturalizing” human nature. For the sense-making world of humans, the term “naturalism” is exclusively defined with reference to the biological attributes of the human race. Today humanism is challenged by powerfully argued biological theories aimed at understanding human behaviour through reference to the genetic conditions of human life and by the physical structuring of the human brain.

In this respect humanism can be acknowledged as, and actually presents itself as, a critique of all such theories of human nature (cf. Sturma 2006). Instead it lays claim to the non-deterministic nature of the human person in so far as this pertains to the arenas of life-practice and social relationship, where all participants become referents to their cultural orientations. By this reference they can understand each other and give reasons for what they are doing, suffering, and for failure. Humanism makes human life comprehensible by referring to (subjective) reasons for what people do and not to (objective) causes of their doing. Humanism emphasizes human

subjectivity as a constitutive element for rendering intelligible the world of human experience, whereas naturalism stresses only the biologically determined aspects of human life, which have a more external relationship to human subjectivity. Humanism will always argue for the values, norms and constraints of human culture, which can never be replaced by a one-sided application of scientific knowledge. Humanism insists on the principal difference between cultural knowledge humans always use in giving their lives meaning and significance on the one hand, and the logic of scientific knowledge and its rational explanation by referring to causal laws.

6. Further Steps

This book is the first attempt to present such a worldwide humanism which can inspire the different fields of human activities and social practices, encompassing different traditions and world views and at the same time giving place for these differences in the common processes of globalization. It is impossible to address all the above mentioned issues within the scope of any single article, but the field in general is brought more into focus. The first part seeks to thematize the present situation by referring to different cultural traditions and their roles in shaping world views within which the different cultures have to face their common destiny, the challenge of globalization. Two non-European voices present humanism as an answer to this challenge using their different and unique perspectives. But within these different perspectives a common tendency is visible: At one glance, Euro-centric dominance in shaping humanist thought has been relegated to the back shelves; but at the same time its influence on the task of shaping a new humanism beyond a strict hegemony of one tradition over all others can still be respected and enhanced by the rich voices of humanists from many geo-historical traditions.

The second part presents a variety of cultures by thematizing the Chinese, the Indian, the African, the Islamic and the western traditions and their present-day-importance for intercultural communication. There exist, of course, more humanisms in other traditions and in cultural orientations in different places of the world. They can be addressed as potentials of humanizing the world, or they can be observed as still effective in many ways. This book does not pretend to present the range of humanisms in history and to day, but it gives an impression of its variety. The many forms of humanism are a precondition for a fruitful future-directed intercultural communication on basic values of cultural orientation. It gives hope for the emergence of a word-wide discourse, but, at the same time, it indicates the lot of work still to be done in order to bring about a new humanism which transgresses all cultural differences and opens up new spaces for acknowledging them.

The third part picks up the challenge of the religious tensions of today. The three Abrahamic religions were addressed: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All of them have their own humanistic elements and anti-human

dangers. The constellation of contributions lends an image which presents religion as an essential element of future-directed, and at the same time, necessarily self-critical analysis for the development of these humanist dialogues. Religious differences have the power to divide human kind into conflicting parties. But religion itself has always been a power of transgressing the borders of division of people as well. It has united the people beyond their ethnic, national and cultural differences without ignoring them. It is this power in the depths of the human mind where religious beliefs move the lives of the people, which is necessary for the strength of a new humanism in the intercultural communication of today.

The fourth part is dedicated to three approaches to humanism: the issue of gender in shaping humanism, the importance of literature, and social conditions of cultural life. Nobody can deny that the normative character of being a human being has been realized in highly different chances and degrees. One of the most important goes along the line of gender difference. This difference is historically changing, of course, and especially so in the process of modernization. It would be a simplistic view to diagnose a growing equality; but if humanism is aware of the importance of gender the criteria of equality should be applied in a critical way against the different traditions and for a future perspective of change and alteration.

Last, but at all least, literature is presented as an important cultural medium without which humanism will lose the empowering force of the human imagination. Without the imaginative forces of the human mind the new humanism in concern can't be articulated and realized. Humanism should be considered as a moving cultural force in political, economic and social life. But its sense-generating power has to go beyond the limits of this "reality" into the realms of imagination, fantasy and fiction. It will not escape the constraints of practical life, but empower the human mind to go beyond it and to make it more humane.

The idea of humanism must always to be put into social contexts in order to make it plausible and give it its place in real life. Looking at the issue of human values only in the field of culture, i.e. in the processes of human sense generation, will miss it. Humanism has to be understood and further developed as a mental and spiritual element within the constraints and burdens of concrete social life. Here is the place where its solidity and soundness are being tried and tested.

At the end, three outlooks are presented which address the future of humanism. This future is a matter of organizing and critically reflecting intercultural communication as the special field of cultural activities all over the world. It is a matter of thematizing cultural difference under the auspices of the unity of mankind come and it is a matter of experiences and strategies of practical life, especially in the field of politics.

Taking all parts of the book together, it presents conditions and chances to meet the cultural challenges of globalisation and to give answers that may open a door to a new vision of what it means to be a human being and to a way of life, in which the idea of human dignity is moving the minds of the people.