

U3A Port Phillip

Term 4, 2018

Philosophy of humanism and the posthuman

*Class 4 notes (30 October 2018)*

**1. Introduction**

**Humanism:**

Man as Secular; Rational; free

**Summary of last class:**

**“Freedom as individual liberty”**

1. Rights (Locke; Wollstonecraft)
2. Liberty J.S.Mill
3. Primacy of the individual – autonomous; ‘entitled’; self-sufficient; free;
4. Morality as the sphere of the private; free of state intervention

**Liberty vs Equality?**

Conflict between Freedom of speech and anti-discrimination laws =

Conflict between freedom and equality (discrimination = unequal treatment).

But equality is arguably a pre-condition of liberty

Mary Wollstonecraft: ***Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)***: insistence on liberty as the birthright of man. But liberty requires independence in the sense of not being vulnerable to the whim or arbitrary will of another (e.g., slavery; women)

Equality a pre-requisite of Liberty, not a value opposed to it.

**Today’s Class**

- Triumph and decline of humanism;
- Michel Foucault: “death of man”; (*carried over til Class 5*)
- Meanings of the posthuman: Braidotti; Bolter; Haraway (*carried over til Class 5*)

**See Timeline: The Enlightenment Vision**

- Renaissance – summed up as “art, science, genius, money” (Donna Haraway)
- Enlightenment – secularism, reason, autonomy, ...
- Modernism – freedom, money, progress, optimism ....

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## **2. The Triumph of Humanism**

*Reason as basis of moral and social progress:*

Reason tied to moral progress is seen as a secular value rather than virtue (godliness)

Pursuit of happiness – achieved by reason i.e., science liberates us from toil, ignorance, superstition, etc.

Reason; freedom; happiness – basis of enlightenment virtues

Addition of “**happiness**”; “**progress**” to complete the Enlightenment vision: This ushers in the era of modernism

**Bentham’s utilitarianism** introduces notions of ‘happiness’ and ‘progress’ as desirable characteristics:

Utilitarianism: “the ethically right choice in a given situation is the one that produces the most happiness and the least unhappiness for the largest number of people.” Bentham, J.S.Mill, Peter Singer

- Consequentialist;
- Hedonist;
- Instrumentalist
- Quantitative

social engineering: the Panopticon as symbolic of this – managing quantities, but also exercising control.

### **Progress**

- *Scientific*: knowledge, discovery, method
- *Technological*: instrumentation – navigation - trade – consumerism
- *Social*: freedom; equality; democracy
- *Moral*: abolition of slavery; education; social welfare; universal rights

*Values: progress; optimism - - arrogance; triumphalism; material wealth.*

Human exceptionalism: man as master of his destiny; man as all-powerful

### **Modernism**

Manifestations in architecture; movies;

Capitalism – pursuit of self-interest

Ayn Rand: pursuit of self-interest to the exclusion of all else (movie, *The Fountainhead* is based on her book *Atlas Shrugged*)

The other side of the story: the crumbling of enlightenment values; the decline of humanism

## **3. Decline of humanist values**

= disenchantment with enlightenment vision when the realities are faced:

War and violence

Social inequality

Political corruption

Domination of weak by the powerful

Oppression of minorities

Environmental degradation

Disintegration of institutions

Psychological malaise: 'age of nothing'

Some "Last ditch attempts" to salvage the enlightenment vision:

Francis Fukuyama: "the end of history" (1992);

Steven Pinker: defence of enlightenment values (2018)

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#### **4. Introducing the posthuman**

##### ***Man de-centred***

*Changing conceptions of man and his place in the scheme of things:*

*Man decentred = man no longer the 'centre of the universe' – no longer in control of his own destiny*

Copernicus – the heliocentric universe;

Darwin (1859) – man/animal;

Marx – man a product of class;

Freud – man a product of the unconscious;

Postmodernism "death of the author" (Roland Barthes; Jean Baudrillard examine products of popular culture to interrogate accepted foundational notions of 'truth', 'the real');

post-secularism

the post-human

(Still to come: Foucault; Meanings of the posthuman)