

**“WORLDVIEW IN FOCUS”**  
**Session 4: “The History of Humanism”**  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The word "humanist" derives from the 15th-century Italian term *umanista*, meaning a teacher or scholar of Classical Greek and Latin literature and the ethical philosophy behind it.

Humanism is essentially the idea that human virtue can be created by human reason alone independently from faith in God or traditional religious institutions.

The seeds of Humanism began in the first pages of Genesis.

Genesis 3:1-7

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. **"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Genesis 11:1-9

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, **"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."** But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel-- because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

Proverbs 11:2

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

PRIDE – root meanings: insolence; arrogance; haughtiness

In her independence from the Lord, Israel as a majestic nation, having been set apart by a majestic God, had turned aside and *claimed its excellence as a prerogative earned by herself*. The attitude of insolence was not tolerated by God: "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself-- the LORD God Almighty declares: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it." Amos 6:8.

From Vine's Expository Dictionary

## **I. Jesus came at a key moment in history:**

Stoicism came into being in the 3rd century BC was the most popular world view in Greece and Rome at the time of Christ. Along with the works of Aristotle, it was a major contributor to the Enlightenment way of thinking, and as we will see, it is being revived once again today (in different terminology).

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) posited an ethical system that may be termed "self-realizationism." In Aristotle's view, when a person acts in accordance with his nature and realizes his full potential, he will do good and be content.

The Stoics considered destructive emotions to be the result of errors in judgment, and that a sage, (the wise one) or person of "moral and intellectual perfection," would not suffer such emotions. Stoics were concerned with the active relationship between cosmic determinism and human freedom, and the belief that it is virtuous to maintain a will that is in accord with nature. Because of this, the Stoics presented their philosophy as a way of life, and they thought that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how he behaved.

"Stoicism became the foremost popular philosophy among the educated elite in the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire" *These Were the Greeks*. Amos, H. (1982).

Stoicism offered a unified account of the world:

- Formal logic
- Knowledge can be attained by reason
- Naturalistic ethics

Stoicism teaches the development of self-control and fortitude as a means of overcoming destructive emotions; the philosophy holds that becoming a clear and unbiased thinker allows one to understand the universal reason (*logos*). A primary aspect of Stoicism involves improving the individual's ethical and moral well-being: "*Virtue* consists in a *will* which is in agreement with Nature." This principle also applies to the realm of interpersonal relationships; "to be free from anger, envy, and jealousy,"

Colossians 2:20-23

*Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

Instead... *"put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."* Colossians 3:10

### **The Stoic view of the universe**

"The universe is both active and passive – the passive substance is matter, and the active substance is Fate or Universal reason (Logos), which is intelligent and acts on the passive matter."

"Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and soul" Souls are received into the seminal Logos of the Universe.

"The goal of life is to live according to Reason (Logos), to live a life according to Nature."

"Unhappiness and evil are the result of being ignorant of the Logos of Nature."

**Why did Christianity have such a dramatic impact on the Greek and Roman culture?** ... Jesus answered their greatest human, and philosophical yearnings.

John 1:14

*The Logos became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

## **II. The Enlightenment Era and modern forms of Humanism.**

"Secular Humanism" has often been propagated and popularized through the psychological field of study. Psychology means "the study of the soul".

1870's - William James, a professor at Harvard founded the American Psychological movement. He was a pragmatist and promoted relative truth. True beliefs are those that prove useful to the believer.

1890's – Sigmund Freud introduced Psychoanalysis – defining the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms like repression, and identifying sexual motivations.

1890's – 1930's The rise of Behaviorism, influenced by a Darwinian view of life, regarded that all things that organisms do—including acting, thinking and feeling—can and should be regarded as behaviors. Pavlov's dogs, and B.F. Skinner's consequence experiments are examples of this approach.

1950's – 1980's Humanistic Psychology – promoted by Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and others. A psychology that focuses on uniquely human issues, such as the self, self-actualization, health, hope, love, creativity, nature, being, becoming, individuality, and meaning—that is, a concrete understanding of human existence.

- Rogers – person centered approach to counseling
- Maslow – hierarchy of needs

1980's - Present Positive Psychology - (Aristotlean roots)

Believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities." Positive psychologists seek "to find and nurture genius and talent", and "to make normal life more fulfilling", not simply to treat mental illness.

- Human Potential Movement
- Humanist manifesto

**The problem with tying Humanism to Darwinism....**

**The problem of evil and destructive tendencies in the world...**

1990's – Present Transpersonal Psychology (Stoic roots)

Officially approved psychology in Britain in 1997, first major Google hits began in 2007

A branch of psychology that is concerned with the study of those states and processes in which people experience a deeper or wider sense of who they are, or a sense of greater connectedness with others, nature, or the "spiritual" dimension. The term "transpersonal" means "beyond the personal". Rather than focusing on practical matters, like what career path to take, Transpersonal Psychology deals with more fundamental spiritual questions.

Claims....

Transpersonal psychology is, in the broadest sense, a scientific enterprise - it is NOT a religion or ideology.

Transpersonal psychology is NOT the New Age.

Transpersonal Psychology is NOT anti-rationalist.

Popular proponents: Most recently Oprah's TV network, Dan Brown (author of the Davinci Code)

### **What goes around comes around....**

Ecclesiastes 3:11

*God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

Romans 1:16-17 (Written to the Stoics culture of Rome)

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

For reflection and goal setting

- a. How has self effort played a role in your own life goals?
  
- b. There seems to be some universal moral ideals present in all cultures. What does Christianity offer in addition to this?
  
- c. Where have you seen humility and relying on God produce a blessing in your life?

Coming up:

February 6 Where did we come from? With more to follow in coming weeks!

The audio and notes for this and previous sessions of this series are available at [www.sequimcommunitychurch.org](http://www.sequimcommunitychurch.org) in the Sunday Seminar section