SECULAR HUMANISM AND ISLAMIC HUMANISM – IS THERE A COMMON GROUND?

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Abstract	Abstrak
In the modern and post-modern world, we have loosely used the term humanism to describe many subjects and the use has been too broad for its specificity and objectivity to be precisely comprehended. In fact, at many points, it has lost positivity in light of discussion within the current century. The term humanism or humanist came from the 15th-century Italian academic world to describe the process of teaching and learning of art and literature between teachers and students. It is very interesting to find out that both the ancient Greeks-Romans and the early modern European use of the concept of humanism was very much in order to detach from the rising of scientific and empirical processes, as well as the rise of modern knowledge. Either way, the point attempted to be broken here is the fact that the early history and use of the concept of modernism had completely nothing to do with the detachment of religion or a divine influence from human life and choice. Humanism in both ancient Roman and middle-age European had little or no correlation with trying to steer clear neither from any religious influence nor from trying to be modernized with new knowledge from the scientific world. Humanity and humanism in Islam shall be limited to the recognition of human rights, effort, kindness, generosity, being productive and giving benefits to others in the society, instead of having the limitless and boundless definition, which has become meaningless.	Di dunia modern dan pasca-modern, kita secara longgar menggunakan istilah humanisme untuk menggambarkan banyak subjek dan penggunaannya terlalu luas untuk spesifik dan obyektivitas untuk dipahami secara tepat. Bahkan, di banyak titik, ia telah kehilangan kepositifan dalam terang diskusi dalam abad ini. Istilah humanisme atau humanis berasal dari dunia akademik Italia abad ke-15 untuk menggambar-kan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran seni dan sastra antara guru dan siswa. Sangat menarik untuk mengetahui bahwa baik Yunani-Romawi kuno dan penggunaan konsep humanisme Eropa modern awal sangat banyak untuk melepaskan diri dari kebangkitan proses ilmiah dan empiris, serta munculnya pengetahuan modern. Selain itu, poin yang berusaha dipatahkan di sini adalah fakta bahwa sejarah awal dan penggunaan konsep modernisme sama sekali tidak ada hubungannya dengan pelepasan agama atau pengaruh ilahi dari kehidupan dan pilihan manusia. Humanisme baik di Romawi kuno dan Eropa paruh baya memiliki sedikit atau tidak ada korelasi dengan mencoba menjauhkan baik dari pengaruh agama maupun mencoba dimodernisasi dengan pengetahuan baru dari dunia ilmiah. Kemanusiaan dan humanisme dalam Islam akan terbatas pada pengakuan hak asasi manusia, upaya, kebaikan, kemurahan hati, menjadi produktif dan memberi manfaat kepada orang lain dalam masyarakat, alih-alih memiliki definisi tanpa batas dan tanpa batas, yang telah menjadi tidak berarti.
Keywords: Secular humanism, Islamic humanism, ideology.	Kata Kunci: Humanisme sekuler, humanisme Islam, ideologi.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

In the modern and post-modern world, we have loosely used the term humanism to describe many subjects and the use has been too broad for its specificity and objectivity to be precisely comprehended. In fact, at many points, it has lost positivity in light of discussion within the current century. The term humanism or humanist[1] came from 15th-century Italian academic world to describe the process of teaching and learning of art and literature between teachers and students (Armas, 2001, p. 118; Coates, White, & Schapiro, 1966, p. 4). This early use of the term was largely positive as it studied art and

classical literature with the aim of making well-educated men out of the students. It is very interesting to find out that both the ancient Greeks-Romans and the early modern European use of the concept humanism was very much in order to detach from the rising of scientific and empirical processes, as well as the rise of modern knowledge. Either way, the point attempted to be broken here is the fact that the early history and use of the concept of modernism had completely nothing to do with the detachment of religion or a divine influence from the human life and choice. Humanism in both ancient Roman and middle age European had little or no correlation with trying to steer clear neither from any religious influence nor from trying to be modernized with new knowledge from the scientific world. Therefore, it will be researched in this paper that the current worldwide definition of the term humanism is very much recent and has no long historical background.

What is Humanism?

Unlike the older use of the term, which still recognized the importance of studying and relating to a higher divine nature, the modern definition puts man as the center of his own thinking and acting processes. Humanism, as it is defined in the modern and post-modern academic world, is the active component of man's qualitative thoughts and decisions (Coates et al., 1966, p. 5). A man's thoughts and actions are his own which could be influenced by many ideas and factors. However, the activities he performs as the outcome of his thinking faculty are a direct result of his free will and decisions. All attempts at understanding, at knowledge and at doing things are efforts of he himself and of his understanding.

Secular Humanism

Humanism is more related to secularism than it is religious. It is interesting how humanism has always been aimed to answer many eternal questions, which are rather philosophical than modern, which one would expect them to be satisfied by religious revelation and with faith-related activities. However, since it goes around life issues rather than discussing the after-life, the major concerns are here more secular in nature. This emphasis on humans and human life in a way automatically navigates humanism from any religious perspective. This trend can be currently globally witnessed as humanism embraces issues related to rights, atheism, naturalism, secularism and more important issues related to ethics. Which is very interesting as this paper will later discuss some ethical issues which are questionable but at the same time fall under humanism. This being said, it shows that even the working definition of humanism may still have dynamicity and flexibility in it, and hence lack of a specific belief system.

Humanism in Monotheistic Religions

While the clarity of humanism within religion is partially non-existent, it can still be workable depending on the focus of the religion itself. Many religions have claimed that theirs is humanist as well in nature and therefore we hear of humanism in Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and so forth. Their definition, of course, does not completely jive with the secular humanism version, which gives man complete power, freedom, and free will to arrange and govern his thoughts and actions to produce an outcome he desires. Had the outcome was not as desired, it would mean that there was

an error in his decision, action or ethics. He is always allowed freedom not given in many religions and hence the flexibility of humanism emerges.

Topic Statement and Significance of the Study

The paper aims to create a common ground understanding of humanism, which could both fall under its secular definition as well under religious understanding. Its secular meaning will also be analyzed by comparing different sources. Its religious understanding will be examined based on Al-Faruqi's research and writing about it, with a special focus on Islamic humanism. The topic is significant as it will create a better understanding and a clearer environment where ideologies that seem to be completely opposite of each other, secular and Islamic humanisms, may actually have some commonalities and areas of the accord.

Research Questions

1) What is the significance of studying humanism and comparing it to Islamic humanism?
2) What are the reasons for the rise of secular humanism and the religious responses to this ideology?
3) What have been the challenges faced by many religions, with a special focus on Islam, in handling the rise and attack of secular humanism?
4) Has secular humanism really negated religions and their values?
5) What are the common grounds and mutuality found in secular and Islamic humanism in Al-Faruqi's view?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Man is the measure of all things[2]

This above statement is in general considered invaluable as humanism allows a man to do as he understands and to know himself along the way. In many ways, humanism positively attributes man to any outcome due to his actions and decisions, both good and bad. In order to have a workable definition, which would benefit the academic world as well as this paper, the following definition may be meaningful. This definition may of course at times be too general and vague. A humanist is someone who is interested in the intellectual and academic disciplines called humanities- so called because they deal with human nature in its fullness, the non-rational side of man as well as the rational. These have typically included literature, history, the fine arts, philosophy and sometimes theology. Humanists, in general, become one after conquering the eternal question of "Who am I" and "What am I?" Typically, a humanist is more often than not is someone who does not identify their self with any religion, faith, political inclination and expression of support to strengthen and verbalized ideologies. It shall be properly stressed though that a humanist may entirely differ from another humanist as humanism can be, and is usually, perceived very differently among them (Fowler, 1999, pp. 5–8). While the general traits of humanism would be the strong and fierce recognition of an individual in terms of their ability, capacity, resistance, status, being unique, dignity and free will, it also comes with many other characteristics, depending on how a humanist views humanism. This is where and why the term humanism,

especially in the current global age has been used incredibly loosely to justify many other ideologies and practices.

The extent of humanism and being a humanist is again of course very broad. However, to make sense of the real literal and technical definition, everyone who is concerned with humanity and the needs of it, as well as who recognizes their ability to cognize, make a decision, act on it and live with the outcome, is a humanist in a broad sense. Many would, however, be annoyed to be considered a humanist or a supporter of humanism as there are so many other clashing ideologies, that a lot of people do not want to be known as associated with, are sheltering under the shade of humanism. Fowler in her book made it a great deal that while there are broad understandings and definitions of the system or lack of it thereof, humanism should have a working definition to it. Despite the dynamicity, flexibility, and fluidity of it being worked out and defined, humanism in a way has a stance. She suggested that humanism is more related to secularism than it is religious (Fowler, 1999, p. 9).

Secularism and Secular Humanism: History and progress

Secularism, as many philosophers believe, is originated from the division between the Jews and the gentiles. The Jews, having believed that they were the selected and chosen ones by the One monotheistic God, exclusively considered that this tribal God was there to cater after them and them alone, and other tribes and race of people were of a lower status than them. These other human beings were the Gentiles. Since according to the early Hebrew that the Gentiles were not the selected people, hence they were also those who were separated or navigated away from God's attention. When one was not associated with or was not worthy of any divine attention, he was considered as secular and of a lower level in the religion (Pecora, 2006, pp. 2–3). This separation created by the Jews - despite the effort later on brought about by Jesus (Al-Faruqi, 1967) in order to create universality in the believers of the One monotheistic God-[3] followed by the mistreatment of the Catholic church for centuries to the people of Europe, had brought about in the high Middle Age time to the early Modern period to the Industrialization Era, a phenomenon whereby many intellectuals simply wanted to dissociate themselves from any attachment whatsoever with the Church and with religions in general.

Since the Enlightenment, Reformation and Industrial Revolution times, many academics, philosophers, scientist, and other intellects simply wanted to separate their findings and research from any religious influence, in order that their outcome would not be interrupted, suffocated or even manipulated by the Church. This is where the real root of modern secularism arose. The key concept here is the separation or detachment from any unproven and metaphysical sphere of influence into the intellect and empirical world. Pecora in his book tried to create a correlation between secularism and humanism. He later made the integration between the two whereby the popular term 'secular humanism' is mentioned in the book. "Secular humanism [...] is thus a humanism" according to him (Pecora, 2006, pp. 4–9). He claimed as such as the objective of secularism is to primarily advocate the free will and freedom of man by attaining and making use of knowledge and the academic world. This knowledge should, however, be obtained through constant and consistent seeking using empirical

methods, rather than due to some revealed unquestionable truth, much like offered in many religions. This is where secularism and religions are not compatible. Their initial aims are rather adversely different from one another. Secularism's both primary aims and methods require human's freedom and curiosity to approve and deny physical solid information, while religions' measures mostly require complete faith and a soul, which of course is very much questionable in the secular world. While secularism and religions may have a similarity somewhere as to an extent they both could fall into the humanist group, but their sky-high differences in values are greater and almost completely opposite of each other.

Secular humanists suggest that religion has inflicted terrible suffering, especially on those who stray from the "right" path, the use of "revelation truth" by religions is an attack on human freedom and that ethics should be based on reason, not a revelation. They try to apply reason to human actions, for examples, one; ethics that are based on utilitarianism where the idea that what is ethical must be useful to the individual, not necessarily to the common good, and two; the human rights tradition that include ideas that all humans have inherent rights and freedoms, that these are individual rights, and that governments must protect these rights against infringement.

DISCUSSION

Moral and Ethical Relativism in Humanism? In Western Perspective

The ethics in humanism and secularism are discussed extensively, defensively and apologetically in Paul Kurtz book (Kurtz, 2008). He claimed to have written and published the first edition of the book while secularism and humanism were under great attack by the Church especially the Evangelist Church in the United States. He is a self-proclaimed and passionate humanist philosopher who's been bringing about the notion that human beings may and can live a harmonious, decent, peaceful and morally responsible without the needs of religion or any metaphysical influence in their life. He, of course, calls all those who oppose and who believe in any sort of divine nature as, fundamentalists.

It should be noted though that the author is a convinced person with this belief system, if it could be called that, for the lack of a better word. For a logical mind, yes his arguments make perfect sense. He completely refutes that morality and ethics without any base in any religion would be relative[4]. To him, to go back in time where most religions were founded would be ridiculous as most methods, decisions, and lifestyle have evolved and most of those offered in many religions have outdated. In a way, he tries to argue that if relativism was the topic here, everything is relative. Practices and teachings in religions are as well.

Moral and Ethical Relativism in Humanism? In an Islamic Perspective

While humanity and the rights of humans, in fact even rights of animals and the environment, are very highly upheld in Islam, to use the current global definition of humanism to Islamic humanism will not be correct or fair. There are just too many issues that arise as the outcome of lifestyle, which justifies themselves as humanism. Many of these problems or issues are far from being condoned in Islam. Among the

issues that have risen due to the loose and broad application of deviated humanism are the following; moral relativism, ethical relativism, the relevance of many laws both secular and religious, pluralism, indifference, moral issues transform to become human rights (LGBT, homosexuality) and crimes being punished lightly due to human rights, to mention a few. It has become almost absurd that many moral and ethical issues that would have been deemed as serious and grave to many societies not too many centuries ago have now been perceived as human rights. While in quite a few cases this has been a good thing[5], in other cases the effects are rather worrying. Ethics and morality no longer have a specific standard, parameter or definition. Under humanism, their parameter is not bound to the ground, rather it changes from time-to-time, from country-to-country, and from need-to-need (Makdisi, 1990, pp. 348–354). Relativism has become a threat in this current global world. What is right and wrong to one is perceived vastly differently to another person. A clear definition of a moral standard is now vague. The greater danger behind this relativism is when a nation or a civilization that is powerful, will have the power to define the standards. This is absolutely true today as the power hold our attention through the media. They shove ideas to our mind, both directly and indirectly. While there are many positive things being shown to us, there is also a great deal of dangerous though subtle ideologies imposed on our minds.

Just a few decades ago, even in the most western of the western world, the idea of a gay couple, lesbian, transgender, and bisexuality would be not only frowned upon but at times being handled negatively and physically. Today, due to massive support from the political and entertainment world, to mention something that would sound unsupportive to these groups would be a no-no. One would be accused of doing a hate crime. While this lifestyle may not hurt or harm anyone especially those living in a country that is open, harmonious and respectful of each other's rights and expression, such as in Holland and New Zealand, still it is something that is very unacceptable to the nature of many religions and beliefs. Humanism has brought about the situation where to even discuss this matter is very sensitive and unacceptable. The global society has become indifferent of the issues that used to be heavy and negative. We have become, willingly or unwillingly, individual. We only voice out when it comes to issues that are being advocated loudly in the media, but go silent on issues that have no popular support. To top it up, many countries have revised their laws and legal system in order to be more humane and humanist. Many criminals are punished lightly despite the irreversible evil acts they may have done to others.[6] It is both interesting and confusing how an ideology that was and is supposed to bring about the best in humans and humanity has come out so demented and questionable. None of these jives well with Islam or with any other religions (Carroll, 2007, pp. 13–15).

Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism

Al-Faruqi said that man is very capable in understanding his universe, in a way that he values goodness and bad as something that is natural to him as a human being. These values as understood by man are not something that is only superficial nor are they only emotional. Al-Faruqi refuted the post-colonialism "emotivist" who said the understanding of the universe is simply an expression of emotions and rather of a response.[7] Islamic humanism according to al-Faruqi is the true universal humanism as it includes all without any tribal, ethnic or religious boundaries. It does not define

humanism in a way that put humans too much in the center and making humans the egocentric core, where too much free will, freedom, and power are not only given but imposed as well to and on humans. This way the humans are the source of good and bad instead of values being the ones good or bad. In Judaism the concept of humanism practically doesn't exist, as only one tribe or race, the chosen Hebrew Jewish race is the magnificent and above others and hence when universalism doesn't have a place, nor will humanism. Hellenism, on the other hand, doesn't really the concept of humanism while Christianity puts man as a fallen creature, who has to wait for the Son of God to save them from the original sins.

In Islamic humanism, man has the free will to respond ethically to his surrounding and make conscious decisions within the ethics on intents where he is aware of his intentions, actions and possible outcomes of his actions. A man should be responsible for his thoughts, understanding, expression, and impacts of his expression. He should realize the values in every action instead of only responding and not held responsible for his responses. He is also isn't the center of all processes. He has the control of processes but he isn't an egomaniac with an egocentric world rotating around him as the master of all actions and expression. Universality actually does exist in between secular humanism and Islamic humanism provided that both would have to agree that there is a higher divine monotheistic power who has control of all man and everything in the universe.

PENUTUP

The Qur'an has many verses that show that while man has their own will power and decisions to make, they are at the end of the day, a very weak creature. They are always in need of God. Every single movement, though, decision and outcome is a blessing from Allah and none of them is the active progress of human power. Humanity and humanism in Islam shall be limited to the recognition of human rights, effort, kindness, generosity, being productive and giving benefits to others in the society, instead of having a limitless and boundless definition, which has become meaningless ('Attar, 1980, p. 79; 111; Siddiqui, 1979). The following are verse in the Qur'an that would give a clearer picture of humanism in Islam.

"God controls whatever exists in the heavens and on the earth, and He has power over all things." (Al-Maidah, 5: 120)

"Men at all times are in need of God, and it is He alone Who is utterly free of need." (Fatir. 35: 15)

"Man was created weak and impotent." (An-Nisa, 4: 28)

"Whether you warn them or warn them not, they will not believe you. God has placed a seal on their hearts; there is a veil over their ears and their eyes, and a painful torment awaits them." (Al-Baqarah, 2: 6-7)

"Certainly you are accountable for what you do." (An-Nahl, 16: 93)

"We have shown man the path of truth and the path of falsehood; he may choose either the path of guidance and offer the thanks, or choose the path of ingratitude." (Al-Insan, 76: 3)

"Verily, We have created all things with Qadar." (Al-Qamar, 54: 49)

"No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but it is inscribed in the Book of Decrees (Al Lawh Al Mahfooz) before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allaah." (Al-Hadeed, 57: 22)

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[1] The term used is umanista. It was used specifically to differentiate from the early rise of Reformation and Renaissance which were very much associated with the scientific discovery and with philosophy. Umanista was cautiously used to simply describe the teaching and learning of classical art and literature.

[2] An infamous sentence by Protagoras, a Greek philosopher in the 5th BC. He was neither an atheist nor was he religiously bound when it came to his philosophy. This was the period where the philosophy started to shift their focus and questions from the natural science world to the topics of justice, values, meaning of life and the essence of a good life. This could be one of the origin of the discussion of humanism in terms of man's decision and world view, instead of divinely bound.

[3] [..] by his breakthroughs in spreading the first and foremost love to God and to one another, as well as equality of all mankind.

[4] As in relative to time, place, people and changes.

[5] For example in the case of human, woman and animal rights. Before the end of the 20th century, in many parts of the world none of these rights were recognized. People of a darker color for many centuries were enslaved simply because they were assumed and perceived to be barbaric and of a lower mental and physical capacity from a lighter skin color class. Women, too, for many centuries have fought for the rights that their voice to be heard academically, socially, culturally and politically. Treatment towards animals has become better and more awareness has been risen in taking care of the environment. These would be among the greatest achievement of humanism which cannot be denied.

[6] A good example here, is the laws to punish pedophiles in Holland. Despite the fact that these people may have scarred a child for life by sexually abusing them, they will only face a jail time no more than 7 to 9 years. While their victims suffer a lifetime trauma, the criminals' human rights are held up high.

[7] Ibrahim Zein's lecture (Prof. Dr.). RKUD 7311. Class session on 9th May 2014. Al-Faruqi's Islamic Humanism.