



Humanism and Religion: A Defence of Christianity Against Agnostic Atheism

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Abstract:

This exercise sets out to explore the philosophy of Humanism in its various manifestations and to subject the secular humanist theses of agnosticism and atheism through the anvil of philosophical disquisition to test their consistency and logical viability especially in the light of the belief system of Christianity. The major methods of analysis and criticism were utilized to achieve the core objective of the essay as spelled out above.

Some of the concluding inferences distilled include the illogicality of the theses of agnosticism and atheism and the position that the very supernaturalism which secular humanism attempts to negate appears to be an inescapable and inevitable albatross which if negated will render humanism devoid of its sun and thus susceptible to a possible extinction.

Keywords: spiritual-morality, election, honor, politeness, roots, repetition, spiritual enlightenment, an important factor, injustice.

Conceptual Clarification

Specifically, the term humanism is the appellation employed to designate the intellectual, literary and scientific movement of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries which rediscovered antiquity through the study of ancient classics and shifted intellectual discourse from the medieval focus on theology, the supernatural and the sacred to focus on human studies, nature and the mundane. It could be conceived as the cultural capital that signaled the break from medievalism, heralded the dawn of the renaissance and made a forecast of the rise of modernism.

In the renaissance era, humanistic studies were termed, *Studia humanitatis* whose scope included courses like moral philosophy, logic, history, grammar, rhetoric and poetry. The group of scholars who cultivated interest in the *studia humanitatis*; “humanities” in contemporary terms, were called “umanista” (humanists) in opposition to the medieval scholastics. The people who engaged in the study of the different courses that defined *studia humanitatis* studied the original classical manuscripts and the literature that corresponded to those courses using the pristine Greek, Latin and Hebrew languages that were used in writing them rather than relying on the translated versions provided by the scholastics which the humanists through the aid of textual criticism condemned as adulterated. The revival of interest in the classics, for the humanists connoted a deep import of being directly in touch with reality. In the course of their excavation of antiquity they observed a clash between the divine,

transcendental and the unworldly perception which suffused medieval thought and the mundane, immanent, profane, human, pagan and naturalistic conception that pervaded ancient ideas. John Perry, in this respect observes that “with the rediscovery and re-appreciation of the texts and arts of the Greeks and Romans, human life, in this world, moved to the center of attention, while God, Heaven, angels and the like, the focus of medieval thought moved aside (Philosophy Talk. “Humanism” www.philosophytalk.org). It is worth adding that though the seed of humanism was planted in antiquity, germinated into promiscuous manifestation in the Renaissance, it was a 19th century German Scholar, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer who first coined the term “Humanism” to designate a programme of study distinct from scientific and engineering academic disciplines.

Genealogical Evolution and Typologies of Humanism

Humanism is an ever bourgeoning and insurgent maelstrom of multiplex sediment of anthropocentric thoughts and affirmations which have buffeted the various eras of human civilization with increasing intensity, generating the prevailing magnetic issues for intellectual ponderment and giving birth to ardent pundits, polemicists and loyalists of various disciplinary persuasions. At the core of the philosophy of humanism is the valorization of the idealness of the humankind as the center of the universe. Consequently, the particulars and peculiarities of some of those ancient ideas that crystallized into the philosophy of humanism are worthy of examination. This is necessary because the ascendancy of this philosophy is remotely traceable to the tributaries of thoughts of the ancient thinkers from diverse climes whose philosophies provided the germane seminal traits that constitute the substance of humanism.

In the African context, the idea of communitarianism in which reality is viewed as oriented towards the human social vortex, could be located as the gem of the philosophy of humanism. This idea reverberates in the different shades of philosophical thoughts in Africa and is manifestly clinched by a proverb from the African people of Cross River/Akwa Ibom extraction thus: “Owo ade abasi isong ono Owo” (Man is a god on earth to man). This sagacious dictum projects the idea of the ultimate part man plays in determining human affairs. The aphorism of the Bantu people of Africa which asserts that “Mothō ke motho ka Batho babang, Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (a person acquires personhood through other people) implies the humanist idea of the primacy of the human being in the universe.

In the West, the rebelliousness of Prometheus, a character in ancient Greek mythology who stole the fire of the gods and descended with it to the earth, is referenced as emblematic of the humanist theme of defiance to orthodox authority. In the same clime, Thales and Xenophanes are credited as ancient precursors of humanism for their audacious intellectual breaking up with supernaturalism to solely concentrating on the investigation of nature and attempting to explain reality using the power of human reason alone. The relativism orchestrated by Protagoras, an ancient Greek sophist associated with the “man is the measure of all things” fame, conduces with the humanist tenet of relativising moral values to human nature and experience alone (British Humanist Association, “A Short Course on Humanism”, <https://humanism.org.uk/9/11/2016> page 7). The agnosticism of Protagoras over the idea of gods, whereby he is credited to have said, “As to gods, I have no means of knowing either that they exist or they do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life”, is celebrated by most humanists as the forerunner of humanist theistic agnosticism, nay atheism. Still, within the purview of ancient Western history, Socrates’ affirmations of human’s epistemological and ethical capacities are referenced as remote sources of some humanists’ claim that humans possess the intellectual power to know and do the good devoid of any supernatural dependence. Socrates’ skeptical attitude to received

views is applauded by many humanists as an idyllic humanist disposition. Also, so many humanists give credence to Aristotle's naturalism as one of the precusorial fountains of humanism.

Renaissance Humanism

One of the early humanists who is venerated as the father of Italian humanism is the towering renaissance poet and philosopher Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304 – 1374). The New World Encyclopedia ("Petrarch" www.newworldencyclopedia.org) reveals that Petrarch's major preoccupation was the recovery of Roman and Hellenic lost culture. The magnitude and magnificence of his works on Latin poetry occasioned his coronation as a poet laureate. He utilized his office as a poet to traverse the length and breadth of Europe searching for and collecting ancient manuscripts. Petrarch is viewed as an encyclopedic mind whose fecundity produced several celebrated literary works.

Credit is accorded Petrarch for the rediscovery of some important Latin texts by Cicero and Livy (E. B. Fryde, *Humanism and Historiography* 5). In respect of his discovery of the classics and how it vilifies the intellectual integrity of the medieval scholastics, he notes that:

Each famous author of antiquity whom I recover places a new offence and another cause of dishonor to the charge of earlier generations, who not satisfied with their own disgraceful barrenness, permitted the fruit of other minds, and the writings that their ancestors had produced by toil and application to perish through insufferable neglect. Although they had nothing of their own to hand down to those who were to come after they robbed posterity of its ancestral heritage (cited in the New World Encyclopedia, "Petrarch" www.newworldencyclopedia.org).

Some authors however raised very provocative skepticism over the idea of Petrarch's origination of Italian humanism. Roberta Weiss is one of the scholars with such skeptical stance. He observes that though authors like Biondo Flavio in his 1453 work had referenced Petrarch as the originator of Italian humanism, but such a view does not appeal to his credulity because, "As a matter of fact, Petrarch and Boccaccio did not start Italian humanism, for the simple reason that it already existed before them. This does not, however, diminish their achievement. For although they relied to some extent on the foundations laid down by earlier humanists, they nevertheless succeeded in erecting upon them a noble building" (*The Dawn of Humanism in Italy* 3). Some of the Italian humanist predecessors of Petrarch who Weiss names include Lovato dei Lovati, Geramia da Montagnone, Albertino Mussato, Benz o d' Alessandna, Giovanni de Matociis, Geri d' Arezzo and Francesco da Barberino. Another scholar who reacts against the temporal priority accorded Petrarch in the history of Italian humanism is Ronald Witt who opines that Petrarch inherited and built on two generations of humanists who preceded him (*In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* 81).

In spite of the controversy surrounding the initiation of humanism by Petrarch, the primacy of place Petrarch enjoys as the preeminent developer of humanism whose works contributed immensely to the enviable prestige and international fame humanism enjoys, is not under contention. Petrarch had followers who carried on with his teachings at his demise. They include Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 – 1375) who discovered the manuscript of Tacitus and authored so many works including the Decameron. In the Decameron, he discusses man's struggle with the vicissitudes of life and advices that nobility consists in accepting the rawness of life responsibly, depending on man's power, acknowledging human limitation and renouncing all absolutes including divine intervention. The humanistic theme of the elevation of man beyond every conceivable reality is evident in orientation of the Decameron.

Another early humanist who was also an admirer of Petrarch was Coluccio Salutati (1331 – 1406). This disciple of Petrarch was made a Chancellor (Chief administrator) of Florence in 1375 and

remained so until his death. A distinctly humanist culture first flourished in Florence during his tenure as the Chancellor partly due to his acquisition of massive collection of books and also due to his outreach to non Roman Scholars like Manuel Chrysoloras; a Byzantine Scholar to teach Greek in Florence. Salutati also hired Poggio Braccioni to take residence in Florence and multiply the copies of important classical manuscripts so as to make them readily available to other scholars (Arts and Humanities Through the Eras: Renaissance Europe, 1300 – 1600 226 – 227).

Another illustrious Italian humanist was Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola (1463-1494). He authored the masterpiece, Oration on the Dignity of man, which is acclaimed as the major text of renaissance humanism. An insightful exposition of Giovanni Pico's master piece and its relevance to humanism is offered by Paul Oskar Kristeller in his "Introduction" to the translation of Pico's work in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. He remarks that that there are two concepts embedded in the Oration of Pico, namely, the dignity of man and the unity of truth. The theme and idea of the dignity of man had been discussed by various thinkers in their conception of the centrality of man in nature and man's proximity to God in the hierarchy of beings. In his work, Pico contends against the traditionalist position by arguing that the true distinction of man is the possession of liberty to act as he wills. Kristeller explains that for Pico "Man is the only creature whose life is determined not by nature but his own free choice, and thus man no longer occupies a fixed though distinguished place in the hierarchy of being but exists outside this hierarchy as a kind of separate world "(219). In this sense, the idea of the liberty of man emphasized by Pico reinforced the humanist' philosophy of man and raised the disorderly humanist' thought on man to a systematic philosophy.

Renaissance humanism which sculpted human nature in very glowing and captivating language, suffered a breakdown in the thoughts of Niccolo Machiavelli which also paradoxically served as a radicalizer of the idea of humanism. His candid assessment of human nature and the consequent cynical submission on the goodness of man vilifies earlier humanist optimistic conclusion on man as beneficent in nature. Machiavelli's mundane and bleak conception of human nature and his sordid and realistic interpretation of political power as contained in The Prince, in substance, forged humanism's idea of revolt and assault against scholasticism. In essence, The Prince assaulted the medievalist's attempt to Christianize man and politics by imbuing the duo with Christian virtues like love, charity, humility, etc. In writing, The Prince while in solitary confinement imposed on him by the Medici, he is said to have reinvented the classical conception of reality by having a personal intellectual dinner with the ancients through a daily study of classical texts. He is cited to describe this experience in one of his letters thus:

Evenings I return home and enter my study; and at its entrance I take off my everyday clothes, full of mud and dust, and don royal courtly garments; decorously reattired, I enter into the ancient sessions of ancient men. Received amicably by them, I partake of such food as is mine only and for which I was born. There, without shame, I speak with them and ask them about reason for their actions and they in their humanity respond to me. ("Humanism – A History of the Hijacked Credo of our Species." <http://humanism.ws/the-editor/a-history-of-humanism>).

In The Prince, therefore, Machiavelli re-enacts the ancient virtue of manly robustness, courage and duplicity. He contrasts with other humanists in that unlike them, he severed power from morality and thereby established a scientific or amoral foundation for politics. In this respect, his amorality fostered the humanist naturalistic or scientific outlook while at the same time deroding the humanist moral advocacy. Manifest in Machiavelli is the inherent contradiction that beguiles humanism: an ardent pursuit of scientific objectivity which is irreconcilable with its professed moral advocacy. Italian renaissance humanism also gave rise to art virtuosi like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

The next phase of humanism was the emergence of Northern humanism, otherwise called Christian humanism with Germany as its epicenter. Italian renaissance humanism had spread its reach to other countries through the avenues of Italian humanists' scholarly correspondence with other countries. Northern humanism was called Christian humanism to contrast it with Italian or Pagan humanism. They were qualified as Christian because they utilized their scholarship and research on the Greco-Roman classics to foster the knowledge of the Bible, enhance Christian doctrines and defend theological tenets. Among the Christian humanists of the sixteenth century which include Johannes Reuchlin, Desiderius Erasmus, Guillaume Bude, Thomas More, Ulrich von Hutten and Juan Luis Vives, Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) has been referenced as emblematic of Christian humanism of that era. He was a profound Latinist with an equally unparalleled knowledge of Greek, a theologian, a critic and an educator. Though he was ordained as a priest, he never wore the garb nor function in the priestly office but instead pursued a scholarly career, travelling far around Europe and eventually joining the intellectual circle formed around Thomas More, the renowned England Lord Chancellor and humanist. Erasmus disavowed the medievalist caution that one should not be engrossed in earthly matters lest risk gaining entry into the paradise and rather subscribed to the teachings of intellectuals of antiquity who were interested in living a virtuous and successful earthly life. His administration of Greek and early Roman thinkers led him to venerate them as being saintly, thus;

The first place must indeed be given to the authority of the scriptures; but nevertheless, I sometimes find some things said or written by the ancients, nay, even by heathens, nay, by the poets themselves, so chastely, so holily, and so divinely, that I cannot persuade myself but that, when they wrote them, they were divinely inspired, and perhaps the spirit of Christ diffuses itself farther than we imagine and that there are more saints than we have in our catalogue. To confess freely among friends, I can't read Cicero on an Old Age, on friendship... without kissing the book, without veneration towards the divine soul (cited in "Renaissance Humanism" chrome-extension://mhjfbmdgcfjbbpaeojofohoefgihjai/index.htm).

The trademark of recovery of secular and humane philosophy of Greece and Rome which was peculiar in the era of renaissance humanism is explicit in the rendition of Erasmus. Erasmus was such an intellectual colossus of that time to the extent that his name was integrated into an adage thus: "Whatever is ingenious scholarly and wisely written is termed erasmic that is, unerring and perfect" ("The Catholic Encyclopedia Christian Humanism" <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/christium.htm>). The trademark of recovery of the secular and humane philosophy of Greece and Rome which was peculiar in the era of Renaissance Humanism is explicit in the above rendition of Erasmus. He was such an intellectual colossus to the extent that his name was integrated into an adage thus: "whatever is ingenious, scholarly, and wisely written is termed erasmic, that is, unerring and perfect" (the Catholic Encyclopedia. "Christian Humanism" <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/christian.htm>). One of the most popular works by Erasmus, The Praise of Folly; in which he exposed clerical hypocrisy and ridiculed other social elites, attracted virulent attacks on him from Catholics and Protestants alike.

The humanist devout cultivation and exploration of human power and excellence, optimism in human ingenuity independent of supernatural assistance instigated great and sublime accomplishment in the literature of the 16th century as exemplified in the literary achievements of William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616). Tragedy and comedy which was an integral part of the ancient culture had nearly demised due to the fall of Rome and the popularity of the theatre had waned due to Christian scholars condemnation of it as wicked and seductive. English playwrights like Shakespeare reactivated tragedy and comedy from a near oblivion and revived the theater. In the Hamlet, Shakespeare adulates man thus:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! (Act 2, scene 2).

This piece could be viewed as a praise of man's uniqueness which bears a striking similarity with Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man. Though most early humanists were Christians who revolted against the church simply because of the mischievous abuses and other – worldly religious doctrines, a good number of them, nevertheless retained belief in God. In this respect, the humanism of this era was theistic in texture and substantially secular in orientation. However, by the turn of the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century and the Age of Reason and Enlightenment era of the 18th Century, the prevailing systems of thought in these eras which emphasized empiricism, rationalism, skepticism and materialism put a giant wedge between reason and religion and between humanism and supernaturalism.

Contemporary humanism is an ensemble of multifarious ideas which Corliss Lamont enumerates to include literature and the Arts, Renaissance, the Philosophy of Materialism, Democracy and Civic Liberties, the Sciences and Scientific Method, the Philosophy of Naturalism, Ethical Contributions from Religions and Philosophies, the Free thought, Rationalist and Ethical Culture Movements (The Philosophy of Humanism 2). Consequently, one can see in the horizon an undulating typology of different versions of humanism, thus:

Modern Humanism: Corliss Lamont observes that modern humanism has many variants depending on the accent one places on a particular characteristic of humanism. Some of the defining characteristics of this humanism include scientific, secular, naturalistic and democratic (15). Lamont professes a form of humanism called Naturalistic Humanism. He says that the qualifier, naturalistic, indicates that "Humanism, in its most accurate philosophical sense implies a world-view in which nature is everything, in which there is no supernatural and in which human beings are an integral part of Nature and not separated from it by any sharp cleavage" (24).

Naturalistic humanism, according to him (24), contrasts with other forms of humanism which have developed in contemporary times. These include the Academic Humanism founded by Irving Babbit and Paul Elmer More. This humanism advocates a return to ancient classics in education and espouses supernaturalism. The Catholic or integral humanism is another contemporary form whose greatest apostle is Jacques Maritain, the French thinker. It follows Aquinas' tradition of synthesis between faith and reason. There is also the type of humanism that is subjective in form. It was championed by Professor Schiller of England and it borrowed from the pragmatism of William James to propose a humanism in which the subjective elements of man were held as sacrosanct and super most to objective truth.

Richard Norman (On Humanism: Thinking in Action 11) traces the origin of modern secular humanism to the enlightenment movement whose major marks of distinction included skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, empiricism and rejection of traditional authorities.

A classic representative of the paradigm of secular humanism is the Atheist Baron d' Holbach who utters thus:

Man is the work of nature: he exists in nature: he is submitted to her laws For a being formed by nature and circumscribed by her laws, there exists nothing beyond the great whole of which he forms a part The beings which he pictures to himself as above nature or distinguished from her, are always chimeras formed after that which he has already seen (The System of Nature 7).

In this exposition, d'Holbach holds that man is essentially a physical reality of material substance controlled by natural laws without any iota of supernatural element in his being. Hence, man's conception of supernatural realities can simply be explained as a projection of the figment of

imagination, a mirage without real content. Norman avers that he subscribes to the tenet of atheistic humanism in which religious beliefs and gods are opposed because of lack of credible reasons and evidence in their favour while in the alternative upholding the worth and dignity of man. He submits thus: “My objection to religious belief is not that it is universally harmful but simply, that it is false. If that is so, however, then we had better look for some alternative set of belief to live by, and that is the project of secular humanism” (17).

Another form of humanism is Religious humanism. The emergence of this type of humanism is traceable to the 1961 unification of Ethical culture and Unitarian Universalist with secular humanism. The Ethical culture movement upheld the ethical content of each religion while eschewing its otherworldliness. The Unitarian Universalists were originally Christians. Unitarians denied that Christ was God and rejected the Trinity while the Universalists believed that all souls would ultimately be salvaged from eternal damnation. Religious humanists view religion as playing the functional role of serving humans needs. Religious humanism does not condone the interference of religious doctrines with the higher goal of meeting human needs. In this respect, Fred Edwords cites a Unitarian Universalist Minister, Kenneth Phifer as saying:

Humanism teaches us that it is immoral to wait for God to act for us. We must act to stop the wars and the crimes and the brutality of this and future ages. We have powers of a remarkable kind. We have a high degree of freedom in choosing what we will do. Humanism tells us that whatever our philosophy of the universe may be, ultimately the responsibility for the kind world in which we live rests with us. (“What is Humanism?” <http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/whatishumanism>).

Though religious humanists may adopt traditional religious means to express their humanism, they unite with secular humanists on the common bases of rejection of supernaturalism, focus on human welfare, agnosticism and atheism. Since religious humanists view religion functionally as consisting only in meeting the social needs of people, they hold that humanism is essentially religious. Secular humanists disagree with the functional definition of religion saying that no definition of religion will be complete without the inclusion of the basic essential ingredient of a belief in the supernatural.

Christian humanism is another version of humanism that is closely allied to religious humanism in its postulation of the functional role of religion but diametrically opposed to secular humanism in terms of the latter’s disbelief in God. This form of humanism possesses some of the religious trappings of renaissance humanism, embraces the moral teaching of Jesus Christ and argues for the compatibility between Christian and some humanist values. Professors Udo Etuk and Godfrey Ozumba are eloquent proponents of Christian Humanism. Etuk’s form of Christian Humanism is called The New Humanism and it is definable in terms of certain axiomatic tenets (The New Humanism 158-174) which highlight its opposition to secular humanism. Regarding the primacy and centrality accorded man by secular humanism, he observes that though there is a heightened concern for man from all spheres of endeavor, it must always be borne in mind that the prized dignity and value conferred on man are as a result of his being a creature of the God who possesses excellence in its highest degree, thus, the conception which views man as the measure of all things, an uncreated product of evolution, a solely natural cum scientific piece etc, are misguided. The above axiom leads to another of his axioms on man’s dependence on God and need of Religion. Man being a creature with soul, which is the spark of God in man, constantly, yearns for the author of his being. This quest is fulfilled via the instrumentality of Religion, hence, Religion is inescapable for the fulfillment of human vocation on earth. This humanism also makes an axiomatic pronouncement on the brotherhood of man which is valorized by the old secular humanism. It avers that the idea of the brotherhood of man makes meaning only when predicated on the fatherhood of God from whom benevolent values of perpetual qualities

could be drawn. Otherwise, the mere idea of the brotherhood of man is vacuous if predicated on man's underived natural goodness which is hardly sustainable in the face of our daily experience of human callousness, belligerence, betrayal of confidence and general decadence. Contrary to the over reliance of the old humanism on science and technology for knowledge, discovery and exploration of the universe, the new humanism cautions that in as much as science and technology could be employed positively to enhance human life, they also harbour the potentiality of growing monstrous and leading to the devastation of human life and the universe, if left untamed. Thus science and technology should not be mundanely pursued for their sakes but in accordance with the divine design of protecting and conserving human life and the universe. In conjunction with Etuk, Ozumba's (13) form of Christian humanism, which he calls Integrative Humanism condemns the mundaneness and scientism of secular humanism. He integrates the benevolent ideas of secular humanism with the ideas of Christianity and disavows the atheism associated with secular humanism.

The Modern Humanist Rejection of God: A Disquisition

Our intention in this part of the work is to subject the major agnostic and atheistic principles of modern humanism through the anvil of philosophical disquisition so as to assess their consistency with viable philosophical reasoning. Generally, an Agnostic is regarded as someone who suspends verdict on a subject due to the inadequacy of knowledge on the subject matter. In respect of God, Agnostics claim that they do not know whether there is God. An Agnostic neither believes nor denies the existence of God. The tradition of agnosticism is traceable to Protagoras who said that "concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be. Many things prevent knowledge including the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life".

Thomas Henry Huxley is credited with the coinage of the term 'Agnostic' in 1869 (cited in David Ramsey Steele, *Atheism Explained: From Folly to Philosophy* 17). The Agnostics maintain what we prefer to call the non-denial and non-affirmation thesis on God. Modern humanism has a literary of Agnostics on its roll call ranging from Robert Ingersoll who is famed as the "Great Agnostic" to Bertrand Russell. An agnostic avers lack of reason upon which to predicate the knowledge of God. This amounts to lack of epistemological foundation for the knowledge of God. Consequently, an Agnostic in praxis must live as if there is no God. In essence therefore, an Agnostic is a practical Atheist. Thus Norman corroborates that "A humanist agnostic would be someone who seeing no basis for a firm belief about the existence or non—existence of any divine being concludes that in practice one should live as though there is no God" (16).

The agnostic and the atheist consent at the practical level and at the epistemological level, they follow different orientations, the former being skeptical and the latter being nihilistic. Though the two differ from each other to a certain degree, a deeper insight reveals that atheism is an extended epistemological cum logical consequence of agnosticism. This is apparent because the agnostic's skeptical tenet of suspending believe in God due to insufficient evidence constitutes a formidable epistemological foundation and logical premise for the atheist's denial.

Our submission concerning the theses of agnosticism and atheism is that those theses proceed from premises which claim lack of evidence and thus commit the fallacy of *argumentum ex silentio*.

Secular humanism subscribes to the skepticism and nihilism of the agnostic and the atheist because religious beliefs are not based on credible scientific explanation hence they dismiss every rational justification of religious belief as unsatisfactory, claiming that they lack empirical or factual evidence (Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* 563).

Though we are not insinuating that religious propositions lack empirical substantiation, it must be stated that the secular humanists pursue the thesis of grounding every religious proposition on

empirical basis perilously as a synonymous correlation to the positivists' criterion of empirical verificationism. It should be stated however that in the epistemic arena, healthy debate is upheld by abiding to the democratic principle of liberty of thought rather than the fanatical adherence to an entrenched position. The age of one criterion and a singular all embracing epistemological orthodoxy has fast receded into oblivion.

The multiplicity, complexity and vastness of reality abhor the imposition of any one epistemological criterion as the necessary and sufficient standard for truth and authenticity. There are various ways of gaining knowledge, among which Religion and Science constitute some of those ways. Each of those approaches to knowledge possesses inherent legitimate dignity as a disciplinary and knowledge corpus. The deployment of an extraneous epistemological paradigm from one discipline, to serve as the yard stick for the determination of truth and authenticity across disciplinary boundaries is not only a gross violation of inter-disciplinary integrity but a monstrous monopolization of knowledge and negation of the democratic principle of openness and participation which is advocated in the Humanist Manifesto (Lamont 322).

Secular humanism's penchant for authoritarianism and intellectual intolerance are patent in the obscurant refusal of its adherents to admit the credible, rational and empirical justifications articulated by many Christian apologists over time. Thus the theses of agnosticism and atheism cannot be said to be predicated on lack of knowledge or credible justification for God's existence because such have been provided by seasoned thinkers. Their non-recognition and acceptance of justifications proffered by various experts is borne out of their hard-line, intellectually intolerant approach of insisting that all knowledge must be reducible to the physical and verifiable via the empirical science method before acceptance as credible knowledge proposition. Their stand therefore, that God does not exist because there is no credible evidence to that effect does not negate nor rob God of existence, but only intensifies the ignorance of those who have refused to tolerate and admit the credibility and authenticity of anonymous propositions just because of the non-alignment of such propositions with their articles of knowledge. Such negative dispositions will breed fanaticism and fundamentalism and turn secular humanism as practiced today into a neo-ideological terrorism which eschews epistemological ecumenism.

The humanism professed by Christianity allows for what we call ecumenism of thought or epistemological ecumenism for the furtherance of human well being. All the commandments and promises of God in the Bible are oriented to accentuate what is good and beneficial to man either proximately or remotely. Thus humanism cannot only be based on naturalism and materialism but also on supernaturalism since Christianity is a supernaturally powered humanism.

If secular humanisms should strictly abide by its principle of jettisoning every knowledge proposition that is not reducible to materialism, mechanism and empiricism, then it will inevitably reject the general corpus of science as it is practiced in contemporary times. This so because most of the fundamental particles of nature peddled by scientists today are merely theoretical concepts devoid of empirical contents. That they cannot be empirically proven, neither vitiates their ontological existence nor their immense utility in furthering human knowledge. Insisting that those theoretical concepts be amenable to empiricism or be jettisoned will lead to the demise of science and ultimately to the eclipse of a very fecund area of human activity. The idea that empirical justification should be the sole criterion for prove of God's existence is an extravagant attempt to reduce all being to the physical and hence is liable to the error of category mistake.

The secular humanist creed that "Any account of nature should pass the test of scientific evidence" (The Humanist Manifesto 11, contained in Lamont 318) constitutes an unjustified repose of confidence in science as if science is erected on a certain and unshakable foundation. Philosophical

inquiries into the enterprise of science have exposed that there is nothing certain and unshakable about science, for science, like every other human endeavour is riddled with errors and irrationalities. Hence to deify science as the paradigm of human knowledge and to insist that it serves as the sole justificatory criterion is to imbue science with superlative, supernatural abilities and translate scientific claims into impeccable dogmas. The danger is that the supernaturalism that secular humanism has been negating seems to be an inescapable and inevitable realism of human wonderment.

Science and religion have conceded much ground in the pursuit of the truth and overall service to humanity. Some Scientists and Theologians have consented that the inexplicable gaps in the Darwinian Evolution theory constitute justification for creationism. Science and religion may differ in their sources of inspiration; science being naturally powered and religion being supernaturally powered but the two orientations meet at the nodal point of rendering service to humanity which also serves as the major preoccupation of humanism. Since service to humanity is the binding force and nodal point for the trio of Humanism, Science and Religion, it should also serve as the rationale for unification and harnessing rather than polarization and dissipation of knowledge in achieving service to humanity.

The humanist will be arid of humanism if s/he fails to identify with the edifying and moderating powers of religion. Religion has contributed immensely to the entrenchment of morality and control of emotions without which the human society would have remained in the Hobbesian state of nature.

Christian religious instruction is purposively for the edification and the dignification of humanity and Christian's allegiance and service to humanity is lackluster if not viewed within the divine mandate of ultimate human salvation. Science will be deficient of humanism if it is pursued as an amoral value neutral enterprise. Such a science will proliferate Frankenstein's monsters which may lead to the twilight of humanity.

Religion will amount to a blind and petrified ecclesiastical fundamentalism if it is intolerant of the skeptical attitude of science and the antagonism of some versions of humanism. The merits of skepticism and critical opposition of science and other forms of humanism must be cherished by religion to tame the exasperating tide of religious bigotry and the emerging vexatious religious terrorism.

Having established that Christianity is a supernaturally powered humanism that promotes ecumenism of thoughts for the furtherance of human wellbeing, it is salient to note that our conception of Humanism is at realm with Udo Etuk's idea of the New Humanism thus:

...the new Humanism informed by the Christian views of man, maintains that man is a creature of God; made in the image of God; and that it is this image of the Creator which uniquely defines man; for man would not be man without it. Man alone, among the earthly creatures of God, is capable of having a conscious personal relationship with God. To that extent, man stands above any other animal, and holds a unique position in God's scheme of things. (The New Humanism 161)

The conception of man merely as a product of evolution is an attempt to vilify the inalienable dignity and denigrate the sublime attributes which constitute the prime values that the human person possesses among other creatures.

Conclusion

In this work, we have done an exposition of the philosophy of Humanism from its definition, through its manifestation in different phases and versions to a critique of the major anti-God theses of humanism. At the definitional level, we have appreciated the various ways of defining the term. The genealogical evolution of some of the typologies of humanism was indepthly surveyed and some of the illustrious representatives of the instantiated versions were credited and assessed.

The hallmark of this research is its disquisition against the modern humanist rejection of God via the theses of agnosticism, atheism and scientism. Beyond demonstrating the epistemological authoritarianism and the illogicality of such theses, the work established that religion is an inescapable nay inevitable realism of human wonderment and noted that the trio of humanism, science and religion have their legitimate values and hence epistemological heterodoxy rather than doctrinaire orthodoxy should be encouraged so that the beauty of those various human vocations could be made manifest. Finally, we reached the fundamental submission that service to humanity is the nodal point as well as the goal that binds humanism, science and religion and hence each orientation should reinforce each other toward maximizing that goal through unification and harnessing rather than polarization and dissipating of knowledge resources.

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