

Human Rights Extremists

A problem arises when people champion their own rights to the extent that the rights of others are infringed. For example, when they abuse the right to freedom of speech by violating the right to privacy and dignity of others. The point is that some rights often clash with other rights and there is a need to find a *via media* or rapprochement between the two opposing rights.

This is coming to the fore in the clash between religious rights and freedoms on the one hand and “woke absurdity” on the other. An extreme example is the return of infanticide in the USA. Not only is abortion permitted up until the moment of birth, but new legislation is now proposing that it may happen up to 28 days after birth as well. This is anathema to people of faith, many of whom oppose abortion at any stage of pregnancy.

In Roman times, there were public complaints about dead babies floating down the Tiber River. Infanticide was widely practiced in Rome until it was challenged by the rise of Christian convictions and values. This is one of many practices that have been challenged over the centuries by Christian beliefs, lobbying and advocacy. Laws were changed and the world has become a kinder place, in general, than it was in Roman times.

Around the time of the Protestant Reformation, a new movement arose in Europe called Humanism. One of the early humanists was Desi Erasmus, a scholar who had a great influence on Martin Luther. However, Erasmus did not convert from Catholicism to become a Protestant. Nor did he accept the last rites on his death bed, suggesting that he may have been drifting away from faith, realizing where Humanism was going.

Humanism became the trending in philosophy, but in his book Sapiens historian Yuval Noah Harari points out that three strands of it emerged. Two of these had deep roots in monotheism.

First, there was liberal humanism. Its notion of the sacred status of the individual was a legacy of the Christian doctrine of free and eternal individual souls.

Second, there was socialist humanism, which is also built on monotheist foundations. The Christian doctrine was that all people were created equal – therefore the emphasis on the collective rather than the individual.

Third, there was evolutionary humanism. This was the most radical departure from monotheism, greatly influenced by social Darwinism. Basically they re-defined the word “humanity”. That is exactly what happens when you reset the Start button of life to 28 days after birth!

I will not digress into where these three strands have led history, but the labels liberals, socialists and Nazis come to mind. Some sat on the right side of the legislature, and others sat on the left.

Human rights rose to prominence concurrent to the ascent of constitutional Democracy. The trending has been to have a Bill of Rights enshrined in your country's social contract or charter. It is ironic when this evolves into extremism that abandons the deep roots of monotheism altogether. At this point, politicians are entering a moral mine-field.

Human rights are not incompatible with faith. The two have co-existed in their different spheres for centuries. But the crunch comes when religion is abandoned in favour of Relativism. This is when all hell breaks loose, to use a term that is loaded with religious significance. (Pun intended.)

What happens now is that decisions – in legislatures and even in the courts - are made by weighing up the merits of the opposing rights. There is no longer a “right and wrong”. Voltaire put it this way: “There is no God. But don't tell that to my servant, lest he murder me at night.” He got the logic right.

Voltaire was a critic of the church during the Enlightenment. He advocated for the separation of church and state. He promoted civil liberties like freedom of religion and freedom of speech. He satirized intolerance. During this same period, across the Channel, the translation of the English Bible had a direct bearing on the emergence of parliamentary Democracy in the UK. Some think that this helped England to avert a “revolution” as occurred in other countries like France and Russia.

According to Davos, one of the three biggest problems in the world today is “polarization”. Who is driving this split?

To what extent did the push of NATO to expand its membership right to the borders of Russia lead to the present war in Ukania?

It would be best to look for a “win-win” solution in which there is still room for the monotheist religions that gave rise to Humanism. It can be argued that Humanism has become a religion in its own right – like Marxism too. These are both “secular religions”. Sadly, they too are becoming intolerant of other views. Now they want to dominate the world stage.

Possibly there is a sense of environmental urgency driving the “woke” agenda so hard? But it would be unwise for Humanism to burn its bridges to the past.

An African proverb says: “The fruit never falls far from the tree”. Is Humanism now becoming intolerant of monotheism, from whence it arose? Is this push what is causing polarization that threatens to dis-integrate the world?

“When roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind.”