

Liberal humanism

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Theory: The English word 'theory' is derived from a technical term of philosophy in ancient Greek. It comes from the word 'theria' which means 'a looking art, viewing or beholding'. In more technical context, it comes to refer to speculative understandings of natural things. Pythagoras for the first time establishes the meaning of 'theory'. To him the word means a passionate, sympathetic contemplation of mathematical and scientific knowledge. On the other hand Aristotle believes that 'theory' is contrasted with praxis or practice. For him both practice and theory involve thinking but the aims are different.

Theoretical contemplation considers things which human beings cannot move or change and which has no human aim apart from itself. On the contrary, praxis involves thinking always with an aim to desired actions whereby humans cause change or movement themselves for their own ends. Theory is actually a complex paradigm because it incorporates different areas such as theory of the literature, science, technology, politics and so on. It is usually thought that theory is the systematic account of the nature of any field and how this nature can be analyzed.

CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF "THEORY":

One theory gives birth to another theory. The growth of critical theory in the post-war period seems to comprise a series of 'waves' being associated with a specific decade and all aimed against the liberal humanist consensus. In the 1960s, two new terms were introduced. "Marxist Criticism", which had been pioneered in the 1930s, reborn in the 1960s and "psychoanalytic Criticism" came in the 1960s. In the 1970s news spread in literary critical circles in Britain

and U. S. A. about particular “ structuralism” and “ post-structuralism”, both of which originated In France.

In the early 1980s two new forms political and historical criticism emerged “ new historicism”. Finally, in the 1980s, a grand explanation seemed to be taking place there was a decisive drift towards dispersal, eclecticism and special-interest forms of criticism and theory. Thus, post-colonialism rejects the idea of universally applicable Marxist explanations. Likewise post-modernism stresses the fragmented nature of much contemporary experience. Feminism also shows signs of dissolving gender studies, with gay and lesbian texts emerging as distinct fields of literature, and hence implying and generating appropriate and distinct critical approaches.

LIBERAL HUMANISM: Liberal Humanism refers to the idea that we can understand or explain our world through rational enquiry. It rejects explanations based on the supernatural or divine forces. This idea became the basis for the development of science on the Western world. It's a form of philosophy concentrated on the perfection of a worldly life, rather than on the preparation for an eternal and spiritual life. In philosophy and social science, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of a " human nature".

The word " humanist" derives from the 15th-century Italian term umanista. The term 'liberal humanism' denotes the ruling assumptions, values and meanings of the modern epoch. It claims to be both natural and universal. The common feature of liberal humanism is ' freedom'. It is not associated with supernatural things. Rather it believes that our observation can be

explained by human investigation and thought. The doctrines of liberal humanism are:

- To know unknown and to create uncreated
- Having rational faculty
- Being self dependent
- Superiority of human beings Absolute freedom of human mind
- Having the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to our lives.

EMERGENCE OF LIBERAL HUMANISM: Liberal Humanism inaugurates rational enquiry and rejects the supernatural or the realm of emotions. It was a response to the Dark Ages when people believed in religion blindly. The hold of the Church was so strong that even the king had to bow down to its decisions. At that time, people were told that they must accept their place in the order of religion. Afterwards, humanism came with a belief in the freedom of human beings to control their own destinies.

It developed during the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and was a response to the challenge of mediaeval scholastic education emphasizing practical, pre-professional and scientific studies. Gradually, people started questioning the teachings of the church. Martin Luther King insisted on reading the Bible rather than following the interpretations of the priest. He argued that we must follow religion rationally. Many people started questioning the rigid ritualistic aspects of religion too. Even scientists like Galileo argue that one must read the book of nature.

Such ideas promote the growth of science and reinforce the belief in observation and rational analysis. It is in such a context that humanism emerges. With this, we also see a revival in the study of Classical Greek and Roman texts. We see the emergence of faith in human rather than divine. In this way, liberal humanism has made human mind free from the existing bondage of religion in Middle age. PLATO (427-347): Plato is the founder of philosophy in ancient Greece

KEY FACTS:

- The material we perceive through our body and our senses is not the real world but an imperfect copy of an ideal world. Art works to reproduce or represent the perceivable material world.
- Literature is important and needs to be regulated or supervised because it has a powerful effect on its readers.
- The content of literature is more important than the form it comes in. According to Plato's philosophy, reason was the highest form of thought and the preferable means for convincing cultural knowledge. For Plato, reason is a process of logical deduction. Stories, poetry and drama appeal to their audiences' emotion more than to the rational minds.

As art arouses emotions, it can never be true. He said that truth can only be apprehended through rational thought, as exemplified in Mathematics. Plato and his followers ignored the fact that we can perceive with our physical senses. In this realm, things remain in their most perfect form and never change. Their static condition makes them eternal and therefore the essence of all the things that exist in our material world are merely copies of the form

that exist in the ideal world. As they are copies, they are necessarily less perfect than the original forms.

According to Plato, we can understand the world of forms only through reason and the process of logical argument. Philosophers use logic and reason to discover truth. By contrast, artists evoke emotions by making representations of the world. Plato considered all arts as representational. Art creates picture of the material perceivable world which Plato called “nature”. But ‘nature’ is itself only a reproduction, a copy of what exist in the perfect form in the realm of the ideal. So, any art that reproduces nature is merely copying from a copy. An artist’s work is always removed from the world of truth and ideal perfection.

As their creations are copies of copies and these copies excite feelings rather than reason, Plato worried that art and artist might threaten social order, and the eternal truths. In book X of The republic, Plato points specifically to poets and poetry in warning that all poetic imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, unless as an antidote they possess the knowledge of the true nature of the knowledge. Plato worried that art, including literary art like poetry and drama tell lies and influence their audience in irrational ways.

This didactic criticism argues that literature is a powerful medium for arousing emotions, without necessarily presenting any rational assessment that it can present a constant danger to its audience. Moral criticism focuses on the content of a work of literature, asking whether its effect is good or bad rather than paying emotions to its artistic or formal values. Aristotle

(384-322 BCE) Aristotle, one of the ancient Greek philosophers, is the 'founding father' of western thought.

KEY FACTS:

- Aristotle's main concern was in the form and unity of an artistic work. Art is not binary to the reason and threatening to logic and rationality.
- Reality resides in the changeable world of sense perceptions or, the physical, material world.
- 'Form' of Ideal can only exist in tangible examples of that form.

Aristotle was less interested in the content of literature than in its forms.

According to Aristotle, art is not an imitation or a reproduction of nature of the world we perceive with our senses. So it is not an inferior reproduction or copy of nature rather it is a process of putting the events of nature into words or paint which helps to improve or complete nature.

For example, when an artist paints a picture of a cherry tree or writes a poem about it, he or she does not just copy the tree but creates a new version of the tree through the process. With the help of colors or words the artist re-creates it. Artists are important because art imposes order on a disordered and chaotic natural world. Literature particularly imposes a particular kind of narrative order on events. For that reason there is a beginning, middle and an end what is described in words. Aristotle believes that art and literature complete a process which the natural world leaves incomplete.

Nature merely exhibits us with events and sensory experiences while art provides us with their meaning. Thus art and literature are a positive social

force which is contrasting to Plato's view. Aristotle's arts, creating order and system help to find pleasure in the representation of an understandable and meaningful reality. The pleasure people take in representations conveys another type of 'truth'. For Aristotle, 'reality' does not reside in a static eternal world of perfect ideal forms rather reality is the ever-changing world of appearances and perceptions.

Plato's concept was that any particular chair was only an inferior copy of the ideal form of 'Chair' that could not be perceived through our senses. By contrast Aristotle puts logic that the only way we can know the essence of 'Chair' the true meaning of chair is through individual instances of chairs. Form exists only in the concrete examples of that form Aristotle's truth resides in discovering the rules and principles that govern how things work and take on meaning in our material world. Aristotle treats poetry and all arts forms, like biology.

He is interested in discovering or creating ways to identify characteristics of various forms of poetry and developing systematic categories through which to classify these forms. Plato founds the tradition of moral criticism about what a work of poetry does to its audience, on the other hand, Aristotle founds the tradition of genre criticism by investigating what a particular work is, rather than what it does. HORACE (65 BCE- 8BCE): Quintus Horatius Flaccus was a Roman poet, commonly known as Horace. He is best known for his satires and his lyric odes.

KEY FACTS:

- Horace focuses on the purpose of poetry, or literature in general.

- The benefit of poetry is highlighted.
- Two sources of poetry are –nature and other authors.

In the traditions of literary theory, Horace has contributed through his articulation of the purpose of poetry. Following Plato, he said that literature serves didactic purpose and it provides pleasure. According to him poetry is a useful teaching tool as it is pleasurable. Its lessons can be learned because the pleasure of poetry makes it popular.

Horace also views nature as the primary source of poetry like Plato, but his concept is that poets should imitate other authors too. In this way, Horace establishes the necessity of a poet to know tradition, and respect inherited forms and conventions as well as creating new works. Sir Phillip Sidney (1554-86): One of the most prominent figures of the Elizabethan age, Sir Philip Sidney is most famous for his “ The Defence of Poetry’.

KEY FACTS:

- Sidney strongly urges that poetry serves both instruction and pleasure.
- Poetry gives a shape to nature so that we can get close to nature. poetry reveals the meaning lying beneath everything in this external world.

Sidney directly attacked Plato for his thoughts on poetry.

The essence of Sidney’s defence in favour of poetry by combining the liveliness of history with the ethical focus of Philosophy is more effective than either history or philosophy in rousing its readers to virtue. To him, poetry serves the dual purpose of instruction and pleasure. It provides a

vehicle for instructing readers in the proper ways to be, think, act, believe and do just as sermon or histories. It provides enjoyment.

Following Aristotle, he protected the puritan accusations ‘ Poetry is the mother of lies’. He answered that if a mere imitation of nature is in poetry, it is an inferior copy or a form of falsehood but if poetry is an act of creation, it can help us to understand the inner of this external material world. These so-called inferior copy, or mimetic, in fact presents a higher level of reality. Sidney says that poetry is the source of all learning. The final purpose of poetry is to lead us to high perfection as we are capable of. Sidney also quotes that a poem is “ a speaking picture with this end, to teach and delight”.

It’s primary aim to give pleasure. Poets are superior to philosophers. It deals with the experience of many ages. If the philosopher is the guide, the poet will be the light. SIR FRANCIS BACON: Sir Francis Bacon, a contemporary of Sidney and Shakespeare, he not only refers back to Elizabethan tradition, but defends it passionately. KEY FACT: *Poetry does not present an inferior representation of the world we live in. *Imagination can create realities. *poetry does not manipulate and lie to the reader. *poetry is greater than rationality

In philosophy Bacon followed Aristotle's theory, which thought that poetry or in general, art is not merely a copy of real world, or called inferior. But rather that it presents a better world than the one we live in. In The Advancement of Learning, Bacon argues that history, fact, and reason can only present the world which describes with our sense, our own real experience. He disagrees with Plato on the fact that poetry manipulates and lies to the reader, but

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instead Sir Francis Bacon says that poetry presents a ' feigned history' which speaks directly to the human soul.

Bacon wants to present that as human soul is greater than the world, so the imagined world is greater than perceptible material world. Even more importantly, poetry is greater than reason because reason can only present pre-existing material world, not alter it, but poetry is able to create a " new world", and to rule over it.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719): He followed Plato. So, like Plato he was concerned with how literary work affects its reader. *Addison explores the question how poetry creates pleasure. * Two kinds of pleasure in imagination-Primary and Secondary pleasure. The power of imagination and power of reason have been distinguished . * Reason investigates the cause of things and imagination experiencing them either directly or through representation. *Art is not just an imitation of nature. Addison was more interested in what a poem delights than in how, or what it instructs. Addison described two kinds of pleasure in imagination. One is primary pleasure and the other is secondary pleasure. Primary pleasure comes from the immediate experience of objects through sensory perception and secondary pleasure comes from the experience of ideas from the representation of objects.

For example we can take The Simpsons and Shakespeare's classical drama Hamlet. Even though majority thought that The Simpsons can create more pleasure than Hamlet but if they have to choose one of them, most of people would rather choose Hamlet than The Simpsons. They supported that the pleasure of Hamlet come from representation of it. It is much better than The Simpsons because people get pleasure immediately but if they thought

about it deeply, they would find that it is actually boring. Addison distinguishes the power of imagination from the power of reason.

According to him, reason investigates the cause of things and imagination experiences them, either directly or through representations. The imagination is less refined than the faculty of reason. The pleasure of imagination is thus more easily acquired than those of reason and widely available to untrained mind. Addison says that art is not just an imitation of nature, but an improvement or completion of it. He points out that the secondary pleasure of imagination makes it possible for an experience which would be disagreeable in actuality to be represented in pleasurable form.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-84): One important aspect to keep in mind while examining the thoughts of Samuel Johnson is that of the birth of fiction around the 18th century, following the rise of the novel as an important element of literature. KEY FACTS: *Fiction depends on the idea of mimesis, presenting stories which imitate nature or real life, unlike poetry or drama. *Fiction deals with the stories to readers as though these individuals were real people. *Johnson is concerned with the morality of literature. Like other art works, fiction is also an imitation of nature or real life.

Actually, art works are imitations of nature. However, they are not merely copies. It is a important conception. Unlike drama or poetry, fiction depends on the principle of realism. When readers read fiction, they would consider that these story or history really happened around our life. The realism of fiction blurred the distinction between the imagined world of art and the real world of history and biography. As a result, the language which is used to write fiction is very different from drama or poetry.

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The language of fiction is usually common language, rather than the language of art, or artifice. Writers use common language to make the work more natural, more real. Johnson agreed with some parts of Plato's thought. He also paid attention to the moral effect of fiction. He insisted that the fiction, such as novel, or fairy tale, is more dangerous than poetry or drama because in contrast of other kinds of art works, fiction is more real. Good art is that art which has a positive moral message and bad art has a bad message that encourages readers to create negative or destructive behavior.

Thus, people who read these works would believe it more easily because of realism. The realism of fiction, according to Johnson, also ties the genre more closely to the realities of human existence because fiction comes from authors who have the direct knowledge of human nature. Moreover, as the source of fiction is natural and events or characters are easily recognizable and the language of fiction is general, fiction is able to affect people widely. Johnson warns that if writer cannot use it wholly, fiction would bring up so many negative or destructive problems.

Johnson suggests to present the proper outcome of fiction where wickedness is punished and virtue rewarded. In Johnson's opinion, ancient Greek and Roman writers presented the best models of literary arts. Those works have withstood test of time, have proved themselves useful.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: From Sir Philip Sidney to Sir Joshua Reynolds, the theorists and critics broadly represent the thinking of Age of Enlightenment, and its debates about the relative importance of reason and imagination. But

William Wordsworth , the first English Romantic poet wholly created a new world of art.

KEY FACTS: Wordsworth broadly follows Aristotelian thought and also reflects the ideas of the school of romanticism, stating that anything closer to nature was superior to anything artificial. *Nature is needs importance. *He is very much careful of composing a poem with feelings. The Romantic conception of Wordsworth endangered on the beliefs about the superiority of all things natural over anything artificial. According to Wordsworth poet is a " man speaking to a man" and that is why poet must use common language, rather than the artificial convention of meter and rhyme which had been a standard since the ancient Greek.

Wordsworth set up a system which believes that the rural is better than urban, the nature is better than the culture, the uneducated thoughts are closer to nature, and better than educated and complex. In stating that " the child is father of the man", Wordsworth declares that children have the sensibility which adults have lost. Children are close to nature and we go away from nature becoming civilized adults. Wordsworth is more concerned with the relation between the poet and the poem than with the relation between the poem and its reader.

His interest is not in the moral effect of poetry. He examined what the poem is, how it is made, and who makes it, rather than what it does. For Wordsworth, poem is not a product of reason, or of art and artifice, but is " the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which " takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". Since then, ' Feeling' was established as the central element of a poem and became more important than the action,

situation, character, or mimetic accuracy. A good poem must have authentic expression of feelings generated in natural setting.

JOHN KEATS (1795-1821): Keats followed the romantic path established by William Wordsworth and Coleridge. He is a great English poet and played an important role in Romanticism, in 19th century.

KEY FACTS: *Rational thought breaks the world into two- subject and object. *Keats argued that empathic and reason, poetry and science, are incompatible and oppositional which being combined can break the boundaries between subject and object. *For a good poet, Keats thought that it must possess have “ negative capability”.

According to Keats, Rational thoughts break the world into subject and object for the reasons of classification and analysis in the Aristotle’s “ Science” Processes. Keats speaks about on interplay in the sense that sensations and empathetic experiences, including poetry, break down the barriers between subject and object and insist on this interaction between the two entities. However, Keats also feels that poetry and science, empathy and reason are two incompatible elements which are also oppositional.

The most important key to understanding Keats in this context is negative capability, which in essence is the ability to stay comfortable with uncertainty and doubt without the need to find certainty. It became the central conflict in literary studies in the twentieth century. Formalist criticism argues that for a poem, they would focus on the resolution or an explanation for the unity of elements, while poststructuralism would recall Keat's " negative capability" instead of answers.

MATHEW ARNOLD (1822-1888): The last one is Matthew Arnold. He is the critic most closely associated with humanist perspective, with the establishment of the humanities, and especially literary.

KEY FACTS: *Preference on literary education *result of good poetry on human beings In his main critical work, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, he argues about the heart of "New Criticism" and the goal of criticism is "to see the object as in itself it really is", free of agendas, and preconceptions.

According to Arnold, a literary education in "the best" texts will make us all better human beings, and make our world an easier and more humane place to live. He sought to defend art on the basis of what art can do to society and culture. He was the first cultural critic who claimed that to speak about literature, one has to speak about culture. He proposed that philosophy and religion could be replaced by poetry in modern society. He held that culture representing "the best that has been thought and said in the world" was available through literature.

Mathew saw culture as the moral attributes to literature. To him, poetry has the unique power of making sense of life and culture allows us to be complete human beings. Literature has the power to create what he calls "sweetness and light". These are the hallmarks of civilization and the citizens who have been educated to appreciate "the best" will develop taste, sensibility, a quality which Arnold calls "high seriousness", and will be productive and peaceful members of their society.