

Theism and Public Policy

Studies in Humanism and Atheism

Series Editors: Anthony B. Pinn and Juergen Manemann

The Institute for Humanist Studies is a think tank that understands humanism to be “a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.” The Institute is committed to production of information through publications and other outlets and the encouragement of practices meant to address the socio-political, economic and cultural challenges facing communities in the United States and within a global context.

Although numerous scholars and activists have written academic and popular texts meant to unpack and advocate for humanism and atheism as life orientations, what is needed at this point is clear and consistent attention to the various dimensions of humanist and atheists thought and practice. This is the type of focused agenda that this book series makes possible. Committed to discussions that include but extend well beyond the United States, books in the series—meant for specialists and a general readership—offer new approaches to and innovative discussions of humanism and atheism that take into consideration the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious dynamics informing life in the twenty-first century.

Theism and Public Policy: Humanist Perspectives and Responses
Edited by Anthony B. Pinn

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palgrave
macmillan

Dedicated to Dr. Warren Wolf
(1941–2014)

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Acknowledgments

A good number of people contributed to the development and production of this volume, and I thank them all. In particular, the members of the Institute for Humanist Studies Board provided encouragement, insights, and sharp engagement during the symposium from which these papers are drawn. I would also like to thank the contributors to this volume for their thought provoking essays. Burk Gerstenschlager, of Palgrave Macmillan, has been a tremendous editor and conversation partner, and I am grateful for his confidence in both this project and the book series of which it is a part. Regarding the series, I would also like to thank my coeditor, Juergen Manemann, for his hard work. I would like to thank two of my graduate students—Biko Gray and Darrius Hills—for proof reading the text and preparing the index. Finally, I say a special “thank you,” to the late Warren Wolf, former president of the Institute for Humanist Studies. His death leaves a major hole in the humanist movement in general and the Institute for Humanist Studies in particular. He will be missed, but his contributions to the humanist movement will be long remembered. This book is dedicated to him.

Foreword

Time has run off the rails. Much is on the brink of dissolution: polities, social forms of life, biographic models of order. What new orders will replace the old ones is not yet in sight. Moreover, nobody may say if what is disintegrated will be superseded by something new after all. This applies to post-modern societies in particular. They are marked by a high degree of pluralism and individualization. Also, they are challenged by fragmentations and non-simultaneities of various kinds. A glance at the field of religion makes apparent its multifaceted discontinuities. Although religion is increasingly becoming a determining factor world-wide in uniting people, the religious situation presents itself totally different in Western countries. The institutionalized forms of religion in Europe are facing a decreasing attractiveness. In the United States as well, the number of those undenominational or nondenominational is growing, albeit slowly. In view of the complex processes of disintegration of religion in Western societies, nonbelievers and nonreligious people, the so-called nones, are striving for novel forms of coexisting. Humanists of various backgrounds are attempting to develop a fresh, nonreligious ethics of conviviality in these multiple discontinued and many times also opposing processes. The “Institute for Humanist Studies” deserves to be the first mentioned there. This institute is progressively becoming a significant factor within the scope of political, social, and religious transformation processes. It does not see itself as a counter-reaction against religions, however. If that were true, humanism would get stuck in binary

power oppositions. For the institute it is not about countering theism with an antitheistic but a nontheistic humanism. Such a humanism is not primarily defined by what it refuses but by what it is: a humanism for all people and one that aims at improving the world a bit. Such a humanism stands for humanity of both the nontheists and the theists. It turns against any form of religion that threaten the freedom of a society. The essays compiled in this book perfectly and paradigmatically speak of such humanism. It is hence no wonder that Anthony B. Pinn, professor at the Rice University and Director of Research of the Institute for Humanist Studies, is the editor of this volume. Pinn espouses a sensitive humanism that constantly attempts to newly comprehend what it refuses: sensitive humanism not about a vain know-it-better attitude, but rather a constant push for safeguarding the humanity of other people. However, the kind of humanism that we support pushes to liberate, which means that it can be pugnacious. For in order to preserve the humanity of the other, entrenched power structures need to be disclosed and broken away from. To this end, the authors raise their voice for the equality of all people. It is for this reason they struggle for a secular public. Their battle does not mean a battle against religion per se. This is what the authors are pointing out repeatedly: it is a battle against the political power of religious groups. Political power always goes hand in hand with certain images of God. Some images of God bring forth repressive political structures, whereas others support discontinuing them. Theism is not any monolithic block. This way, humanists help believers in reflecting the political consequences of their images of God and to recognize their own idols. The contributions do not plead for an irreligious society but for a secular public. All those who advocate this humanism intend to entirely disconnect religion from politics and want to ban religion from the public sphere. According to these humanists, religion should be practiced in the mosque, in the church, in the synagogue or private domain.

This book distinguishes itself because it takes into account not only the American situation but the European and Israeli ones as well. Hence, it becomes obvious that the humanism conceptualized in this book refuses any provincialism, for it is context-sensitive and plural.

This book is a “must” for humanists and theists, for all those who strive for a new ethics of conviviality against any form of fundamentalism, be it characterized by theism or humanism. An ethics of conviviality is highly demanding since antidemocratic fundamentalists too are to be met with respect. Humanists should not refrain from talking to them even if this seems very hard at times. A democratic humanism does not exclude a human being from the communication processes in the society. Such a compassionate humanism tries to help fundamentalists to get rid of their anxieties.

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Hannover, September 2014