

World Center for Humanist Studies (WCHS)

Background and Conceptual Foundation

Background

The World Center for Humanist Studies is an organism that is part of the Humanist Movement. The Movement first appeared on the 4th of May 1969, with a public presentation by its founder, Silo, known as "*the Healing of Suffering*", in an outpost in the Andes called Punta de Vacas, close to the border between Argentina and Chile.

The Humanist Movement is based on the current of thought known as New Humanism or Universalist Humanism. This current can be found expressed in Silo's works and in those of the diverse authors who are inspired by it.

This current of thought, which also implies a sentiment and a way of life, takes shape in multiple fields of human endeavor, giving rise to diverse organisms and action fronts. All of them are applied to their specific fields of activity with a common aim: to Humanize the Earth, thereby contributing to increased liberty and happiness in human beings. In themselves they have in common the methodology of Active Nonviolence and the proposal for personal change as a function of social transformation.

Other organisms to emerge from the Humanist Movement are the Humanist Party, the Community for Human Development, the Convergence of Cultures and World without Wars and without Violence.

The World Center for Humanist Studies was founded in the First World Humanist Forum in Moscow in October 1993.

1. Definition

The World Center for Humanist Studies (WCHS) is an organization dedicated to the study, investigation and diffusion of the thought and vision of Universalist Humanism and its application to current social and scientific problems. It supports all tendencies that go towards the development of knowledge over the limitations placed by prejudices that are accepted as absolute and immutable truths. It also promotes structural, dynamic, relational and critical thinking.

At a world level, the WCHS develops within a diversity of countries, continents and cultural zones. It proposes the elaboration of productions (writings, audiovisual, etc), programs of work, trainings and the diffusion of the Universalist Humanist doctrine: all of which is oriented towards personal and social transformation and guided by a commitment to apply this knowledge only for the wellbeing and development of the human being. It also proposes the creation and development of new Centers for Humanist Studies (CHS), especially in those cultures where it is not sufficiently represented.

To carry this forward the WCHS forms commissions, action fronts and other types of bodies necessary for the fulfillment of its goals. It organizes courses, seminars, debates, conferences, congresses, symposia and other events that are appropriate for the diffusion and presentation of its productions. It edits, emits and publishes its positions for the public opinion as well as to be considered in the decisions taken by relevant authorities. In the development of these activities agreements will sometimes be made of mutual collaboration and interchange with other persons, associations or organizations (public, private or mixed) but without establishing any organizational dependence with them.

At a local level, participation in the CHE is open to everyone who has a genuine interest in realizing the investigations and works directed toward these goals, stimulating the interchange and joint work among its members.

2. Background

The WCHS, an initiative of Silo, was created in the 1st World Humanist Forum in Moscow in October 1993. Its activities were framed within the orientation of Universalist Humanism.

In its first stage, which lasted until the beginning of 1998, the WCHS carried out seminars and studies dedicated to the investigation of humanist traditions and innovations in different cultures, and in the economy and social sciences in general. These seminars were developed together with the Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, cultural centers in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Mexico and Madrid and other university and scientific institutions. In 1994 the WCHS participated in the 2nd Humanist Forum in Mexico and in the following year in the Open Meeting of Humanism in Santiago de Chile.

The results of these investigations were published in the World Center for Humanist Studies Annual” in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997. Also the “Dictionary of New Humanism” by Silo was published, which is today incorporated in his Completed Works, Vol. II.

Beginning in April 2006 the continuation of the WCHS was set in motion by the CHS in Buenos Aires. In this same year new Centers of Humanist Studies (CHS) were formed in Barcelona, Santiago de Chile, Madrid, Moscow, Paris and Rome.

What began then was a sustained activity by both autonomous and simultaneous action in different cities and countries. Meanwhile, beginning with seminars given in different cities in the Americas and in Europe, the study and investigative methodology of the WCHS was developed.

In November, 2008, the 1st International Symposium of the WCHS, “Ethics in Knowledge”, was held in the Parks of Study and Reflection Punta de Vacas. The symposium in Punta de Vacas was preceded by presentations in the Universidad de Cuyo, Argentina and the Universidad de Santiago, Chile. In this event the World Federation of Humanist Studies Centers was constituted, shaped by the CEH’s earlier mentioned and others in formation, and formalized by the assistants taking the “Oath of Ethics”.

In April 2009 the CHS in Europe organized the “Internacional Symposium about Non-violence” in the Parks of Study and Reflexion in Attigliano.

3. Conceptual Foundation

While Universalist Humanism is an extensive and rich doctrine we can highlight the following points as a conceptual base over which a new vision of the human being, society and history has been constructed.

3.1 The Human Being

Universalist Humanism defines the human being as an historical being whose form of social action transforms his own nature, a being open to the world with a social-historical dimension. A being whose consciousness is active and whose activity is the transformation of the world in accordance with his intention, an intention directed to the overcoming of pain and suffering that leads to the humanization of nature, society, one’s own body and oneself.

3.2 Humanist Moments

Universalist Humanism emphasizes the existence of humanist moments in the history of different cultures where the following characteristics can be found:

- location of the human as the central value and concern
- affirmation of the equality of all human beings
- recognition of personal and cultural diversity
- development of knowledge beyond that accepted as absolute truth
- freedom of ideas and beliefs
- rejection of all forms of violence

3.3 Beginning with experience

Universalist Humanism develops its doctrine beginning with *human experience*. It doesn't begin from ideas, theories or abstractions but instead from the observation of one's own experience. This leads its development to include the observer in structure with the phenomena being observed, not from an assumed objectivity that does not consider how the observer affects that which is being observed. This posture of the observer leads one to employ a rigorous phenomenological description before a theoretical description. This is a method that leads not only to an explanation but above all to the understanding of what is being studied.

In this sense and in essence, Humanist Psychology begins from the experience of the existent as *the structure consciousness-world*.

Moreover, the consciousness is experienced as open to the world and in constant dynamic. *It is in this dynamic structure where the base of human experience is found and where the doctrine of Universalist Humanism begins.*

It is from this foundation that a methodology of thought and an ethic of action based.

3.4 Methodology of thinking

We can observe a double capacity in the consciousness. On one hand, it has the ability to perceive phenomena from both the external and internal world; on the other hand, it attempts to order and give meaning to what is being experienced through thinking. It is from the registers of thinking and the observation of its mechanisms that a methodology of knowledge based on the "*experience of thinking*" can be founded. The most general developments of thought permit the elaboration of principals and universal laws.

For its studies and investigation the WCHS proposes a method based on the observation of the experience of thinking. This method, together with universal principals and laws, forms a coherent structure that facilitates the understanding of the problems being addressed.¹

The Method is presented as an assembly of analytical-synthetic procedures that enables an ordering of the phenomena being studied and facilitates their understanding. The use of the Method tends to re-educate the way one approaches learning and one's way of understanding and in so becomes a tool that transforms both the one who investigates and the surrounding world.

¹ Principals, laws and the method are developed in the book "Método Estructural Dinámico", Jorge Pompei, CMEH 2008.

3.5 Ethics of Action

Having experience as the initial consideration, the validity of behavioral acts cannot be pondered without the register that one has of them.

It is because of this, rather than an external moral value, that Universalist Humanism proposes “Principals of Life” that relate with internal registers and orient behavior towards carrying out “*valid actions*”.

The indicators that enable the identification of these “*valid actions*”, that is those that produce meaning, coherence and internal growth are:

- the register of deep relaxation when they are carried out
- the desire to repeat them
- the sensation of internal growth

On the contrary, actions that produce contradiction between what one does and what one thinks and feels weaken the internal development of people.

In social terms, having relationships with others must consider not harming others with one’s own actions; for this to be coherent with the aforementioned we should consider the Golden Rule which states “Treat others as you want to be treated”.

This constitutes a scale of values whose highest value is coherence, a new morality that is not indifferent to whatever type of action, and a new aspiration to be consistent in the effort to give direction to human endeavor.

Genuinely solidarious actions, those that look out for the wellbeing of others over one’s own interests, go in this direction and are those that help the growth of human society.

The search for knowledge and its application should necessarily also have an ethical framework that demands that the investigation and the use of knowledge will only be in favor of the growth of human life, never generating or justifying harm or destruction.

It is for these reasons that the WCHS proposes that scientific research should be accompanied by an “Oath of Ethics” that explicitly commits scholars and researchers to apply their knowledge only in favor of human life. This “Oath of Ethics” gives a basis to all research and guides the mental direction of the investigator, deepening a process of self transformation while he develops his study.

Only this, and nothing else, can be the final interest of knowledge, which is the patrimony of the human process and can then be considered “good knowledge”.

3.6 The social and ethical construction of nonviolence.

Universalist Humanism aspires to the building of a Universal Human Nation as the goal of the human social process. In order to work towards this objective it is necessary to have a methodology of action that is coherent with its ethic. This methodology is nonviolence.

Nonviolence can be understood as a system of determined moral concepts that rejects violence, as well as an operating strategy of the systematic and consistent denouncement of the forms of violence that the system applies.

Nonviolence is recognizable in the actions carried forth by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin L. King, Kwame Nkrumah and others.

While pacifism is the denouncement against the arms race, nonviolence is a method of action and a way of living.

This method of action is formed by the internal coherence of thinking, feeling and acting in the same direction and the social coherence of treating others as you want to be treated.

In moving towards liberty the human being fights to overcome conditions of pain and suffering. In doing so the methodology of nonviolence is a tool for transforming the social-historical environment and for building a Universal Human Nation that is coherent with his own register of his internal unity.

4. Personal formation of the WCHS members

Corresponding to the proposal of Universalist Humanism for simultaneous social and personal change, the members of the WCHS periodically carry out works of personal formation. These works are found in the Manual of Personal Development for Members of the Humanist Movement. The manual includes themes for study, seminars and retreats that are generally held in the Centers of Work in the Parks of Study and Reflection in different cities and countries on 5 continents.

The study themes are organized in 4 parts:

- Themes of Universalist Humanism
- Themes of overcoming suffering
- Themes of nonviolence
- Themes of Humanist Psychology

The seminars and retreats of personal work are based on the books *Self Liberation* by L. Ammann and *Guided Experiences* by Silo (Completed Works, Vol. I). Among the diverse works we note the seminars on the practices of attention, psychophysics and relaxation, and the retreats of self knowledge, guided experiences and the space of representation.

Both the seminars and retreats should be considered as independent units, meaning that each work group can choose to work with any of them following their own interests and needs.

5. Reference Materials

5.1 Official materials

- *Humanist Document*
- *Oath of Ethics*
- *Completed Works*, Silo, Vol. I & II.
- *Psychology Notes*, Silo.
- *Método Estructural Dinámico. Teoría y práctica*, Jorge Pompei. CMEH, 2008.
- *Personal Development Manual for Members of the Humanist Movement. Center of Studies*. Parque Punta de Vacas. 2009.

5.2 Publications of the WCHS

- *El humanismo en las diferentes culturas*. Anuario 1994 del CMEH. Virtual ediciones, 2008.
- *Aportes a la cultura humanista*. Anuario 1995 del CMEH. Virtual ediciones, 1996.
- *Perspectivas humanistas*. Anuario 1996 del CMEH. Virtual ediciones, 1997.
- *Introducción a la economía del nuevo humanismo*. Anuario 1997 del CMEH. Virtual ediciones, 1997.
- *Violencia y tolerancia: historia, actualidad y perspectivas*. Anuario 2006 del CEH Moscú. CEH Moscú y URAP, 2007.
- *Bases humanistas para la convergencia entre culturas*. Anuario 2007 del CEH Moscú. CEH Moscú y URAP, 2008.
- *Ética en el conocimiento*. 8 DVD con el desarrollo del simposio. CMEH, 2009.
- *Ética en el conocimiento*. Ponencias del simposio. Anuario 2008 del CMEH.
- Video *Bizancio, la raíz común*. CEH Moscú, Fundación Pangea y UNED, 2009.

5.3 Recommended Materials

- *Memorias del futuro*, Javier Tolcachier. Virtual ediciones, 2008.
- *Humanism in India. Notes for a Study of History*, Fernando Garcia. 2008.
- *La necesidad de una ética sabrosa*, Néstor Tato. Ediciones el Escriba, 2008.
- *La no-violencia a través de sus guías*, Néstor Tato y Clara Serfaty. Virtual ediciones, 2008.
- *Interpretaciones del humanismo*, Salvatore Puledda. Virtual ediciones.
- *El fin de la prehistoria*, Tomás Hirsch. Tabla Rasa ediciones, 2007.
- Video *Federico II, un puente entre Oriente y Occidente*. Fundación Pangea y UNED, España, 2007.

Organizational guidelines

1. General

The World Center for Humanist Studies is the sum of Centers of Study organized in different cities, countries and continents, in a worldwide federation and in continuous development and expansion.

The coordination of the WCHS is carried out in a World Coordination Team (WCT) of approximately 12 members who distribute among themselves the functions of communication, dissemination and administration that are necessary for each stage. Example of functions could be: information (website, e-mail lists), translations, publications, press and dissemination, global events, finance, legal, etc. The work of the WCHS functions is collegiate and with parity among members, who are renewed every 2 years through direct elections by all active members around the world.

The fundamental body of the WCHS are the Centers of Study (CHS) which instigate their actions in a local geographical ambit: city, neighbourhood, university, etc, with possibly more than one CHS in the same space.

Anyone who shares the objectives of the WCHS, subscribes to the Humanist Document and the Oath of Ethics, contributes an annual personal membership fee and is willing to participate in a process of formation in Universalist Humanism, related with its conceptual foundations, methodology of investigation and ethics, can be a full member of a CHS.

Anyone who, without taking on the above commitments, would like to support the activities or contribute financially for specific ends can be a supporting member of a CHS. Supporting members do not participate in decisions or votes, but they do receive periodic information regarding the activities and projects of their respective CHS and the World Center.

2. Formation of a CHS

A CHS starts with an initial group or instigator who sets activities in motion starting from the basic materials of the WCHS. This initial group elaborates a plan of work (research, study groups with other centers, actions towards the environment) and starts periodic meetings to implement the plan and the personal formation of its members; they start a website and e-mail list.

When the initial group has acquired a minimum development (around 10 active members) and permanence in their activities, it can be constituted as a Center of Studies; electing the functions of local coordination and contact person with the WCT and other centers through a direct vote.

According to the degree of development of the CHS in their point of application and with the aim of facilitating the fulfilment of the objectives in the relationship with the environment, CHS's tend to legalise themselves as "non-profit-making associations" (or however this may be called in every place).

3. Finance

Every CHS finances their activities with the personal contributions of their active members, for which an annual membership fee is established, amount determined through agreements between the CHS's of a country. From the amount collected in each CHS, part is deferred to its own activities at the base and part goes to the World Center. The proportions are defined by the World Promotion Team. The World Coordination Team will account annually for the money received.

All the functions, as much in the CHS as in the World Coordination Team, are *ad honorem*.

4. Direct Elections

Periodic renewal of functions (maximally every two years in the base and every two years at the world level) as well as the fundamental decisions for the functioning of the CHS and the WCHS will be carried out through direct elections with the participation of active members. Re-election will be limited.

5. Recommendations for the new stage

It is recommended that in order to start this new stage, worldwide coordination becomes the responsibility of a “*World Promotion Team*”² of approximately 10 members. They may come from the Commission that prepared this document and others may join whom the Commission considers convenient. It will cease its functions when the coordination teams form after the elections.

² The definition of the implementation details remains the responsibility of this team, such as calendars with dates for economic campaigns and elections, parameters to define the amount of the annual membership fee, distribution by coordination level of these funds, specific functions of the Worldwide Coordination Team, definition of the official logo, etc.