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3 Modern Humanism in the Netherlands

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Erasmus of Rotterdam, who died in 1536, may very well be the most famous Dutch humanist.[1] This chapter deals with the much less well-known development of modern Dutch humanism in the period after 1850. Erasmus, with his conciliatory and moderate attitude and his non-dogmatic, primarily ethical type of Christianity, remains a major influence on Dutch humanism, but, for that matter, Dutch humanism is stamped by the overall history of the Netherlands.

In terms of geography, the Netherlands is a very small, densely populated country in Northwest Europe. Its culture has been very much determined by the struggle against the water. More than a quarter of the country is below sea level and a number of major rivers flow into the sea near Rotterdam. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Dutch started the revolt that made them independent of the Spanish empire. In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands, especially Holland with the city of Amsterdam, was a major power in every sense. Before the British did so, the Dutch ruled the world seas. The VOC (United East India Company) was the world's largest trading company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. International trade was and is very important for the Dutch. According to some historians, the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic should be regarded as the first successful modern economy (De Vries & Van der Woude 1997). The Dutch Golden Age manifested itself not only in an unprecedented increase in (very unequally distributed) wealth, but also in a politically, religiously and intellectually pluralistic and tolerant atmosphere, characterized by a large number of publishing houses, refugee philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza, scientists and scholars such as Christiaan Huygens and Hugo Grotius, and painters such as Rembrandt, Vermeer and Jacob van Ruysdael (Israel 1995).

Compared with the seventeenth-century growth, the static stability of most of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century was effectively a decline, and the country no longer was a major political power. However, this should not be allowed to hide the fact that the Netherlands continued to be one of the richest regions of Europe and the world. For the welfare of its citizens, a country obviously need not be a major player in geopolitics. Culturally, the Netherlands, with its many foreign exiles and its publishing industry has been re-evaluated as the center of an international network at the beginning of the Enlightenment, a radical Enlightenment (Jacob 1981; Israel 2001; Van Ruler 2001). At the same time, the Dutch Enlightenment itself—as distinct from the

ideas of the foreign refugees—was characterized by a strong influence from classical humanism and Calvinism. It remained pragmatic and non-theoretical, "moderate, Newtonian, and averse to all radicalism in religious and political matters" (Mijnhardt 1992: 205). The Enlightenment produced a dominance of liberal Protestantism in the Netherlands. After 1780, the Netherlands waged wars with and was occupied by the French, and in 1830 Belgium declared its independence of the Netherlands. After 1865, the Netherlands industrialized on the basis of steel, coal and the steam engine, and after 1890 even more rapidly using oil, electricity and the internal combustion engine. From 1865 to the present day, the population grew from three and a half to sixteen million. Though income inequality declined sharply between 1916 and 1983, striking inequalities of wealth and income have continued to exist (Van Zanden 2001). With the introduction of social security laws in the twentieth century, absolute poverty practically disappeared. The names of Multatuli, Vincent van Gogh, Piet Mondriaan, the National Ballet and the Concertgebouw Orchestra suffice to show that Dutch art did not come to an end in the seventeenth century.

Politically speaking, one can see a remarkable continuity. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic had a loose and complicated federal structure in which "its many built-in checks and balances ensured that absolute power and arbitrariness were never tolerated in the long term" (Mijnhardt 1992: 201). About 1620, in the middle of the eighteenth century, and still in the nineteenth century, Dutch politics were characterized by opposition and compromise between three main segments of the Dutch population: a Roman Catholic, a rather strict Calvinist, and a more latitudinarian or liberal segment. At the end of the nineteenth century a socialist part of the population put itself into the picture.

An essential feature of this continuity is that each and every one of these component parts of the Dutch nation always was a minority. Centuries of compromise have created a strong culture of give-and-take and of accommodation (Ellemers 1998: 427). In the twentieth century, economic prosperity in the Netherlands has been combined with the social blessings of a pacifying parliamentary democracy with universal suffrage (for men since 1917, for women since 1919). After 1945, the rather open and international character of Dutch society was strengthened by economic globalization, by participation in NATO, by the immigration of hundreds of thousands of people from Indonesia, the Moluccas, Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles, and by the process of European unification. In 1957-1958 a number of important legal barriers to the social equality of women were abolished, and after 1968 feminism visibly gained strength, but the idea that women are primarily mothers rather than wage-earners has proved to be very tenacious.

The changes outlined above imply that social and existential problems in the Netherlands nowadays appear in a very different context from what used to be. One example will be enough to demonstrate the impact. In 1890 the average life expectancy at birth of Dutch men and women was just below 45 years, in 1950 it was about 70, in 1995 is was 75 for men and 80 for women. In combination with other changes, this has had far-reaching consequences. Nowadays more than 10% of the Dutch population is above 65 and retired, a percentage expected to rise to more than 25%. While in 1850 it was rather common for children to be

orphaned, today this is an exception. The average Dutch husband and wife (if one disregards the real possibility of divorce) can now look forward to a period together as an elderly couple when the children (if any) have left home. This life-phase statistically did not exist before 1915 (Van der Woude 1985; Van Poppel & Van Solinge 2001: 47). Obviously, differences in context are not only a matter of time, but also of location. The problems with which humanists (man or woman, white or colored, etc.) in the Netherlands are confronted, are different from those encountered in Russia, India, Zambia and Mexico, or even in neighboring countries like Germany, Belgium and England.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will survey the meanings of the Dutch word *humanisme* in the nineteenth century, followed by a short description of the development of some important humanist organizations in the Netherlands. Finally, I will mention a number of recent developments and draw some conclusions.

Humanisms in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

One way to find out more about the character of Dutch humanism is to see what the Dutch word *humanisme* has meant. Using a large collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dictionaries and the 1837-1881 volumes of the magazine *De Gids* as main sources, one can say that *humanisme* can hardly be found before 1850. The Dutch words for all kinds of -isms appeared at about that time: liberalism, socialism, nationalism. In the second half of the nineteenth century *humanisme* was used fairly often, with four different meanings (Derkx 1998).

1 A *moral* or ethical meaning. Humanism in this sense means that one tries to be morally humane, which means loving all people, being considerate, respectful and friendly towards them. For the important humanist Allard Pierson this moral meaning has a *sociopolitical* edge and is more than philanthropy.[2] For Pierson, humanism refers to the conviction that all human beings are fundamentally connected with each other as persons who wish to develop themselves. This, in turn, refers to the feeling that, morally speaking, humankind is the highest unity: higher than other collectives that might claim loyalty from people, e.g. the church, Christianity or the nation. I found the earliest instance of this moral meaning of *humanisme*, and the earliest use of the word altogether, in *De Gids* of 1847.
2 A *Renaissance* meaning. In this sense, humanism refers to a movement in European history that started in the fourteenth century with Petrarch and ended about 1620. The Renaissance was thought to be characterized by the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy and art. This meaning of humanism can be found from 1858 (or earlier?). After 1860, Renaissance humanism has often been considered by Dutch authors, mostly incorrectly, as the beginning of atheism. An uncritical reception of Burckhardt's famous book on the Italian Renaissance contributed to this.
3 The third meaning of humanism was *pedagogical*. This humanism refers to a pedagogical current which emphasizes *Bildung* towards "true", "higher" humanity as the end to strive for. The study of the language and culture of the

ancient Greeks and Romans was regarded as the best means to this end. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this pedagogical meaning became linked to a certain type of secondary school: the *gymnasium*. In older dictionaries of the Dutch language, the pedagogical meaning of humanism is dominant.

4 Finally, the word *humanisme* was used to refer to a *worldview* or life stance, phrases which I use to translate the Dutch word *levensbeschouwing*. Humanism in this sense is a worldview that distinguishes itself from pre-modern Christianity as practiced in the churches. It is important to note that this humanist worldview had two different variants. Either it meant that one rejected as irrational and unreasonable any Christianity and religion whatsoever, or it meant that one continued the historical development of Christianity and adapted it to modern times as a human cultural product. In the latter case, humanism refers to an open and rational, universally human religion. Many different manifestations of religion can develop in this direction, and Christianity is one of them. *Humanisme* in the meaning of a non-Christian worldview occurs from 1857, in writings of opponents of humanism (among them the Calvinist leaders G. Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper) and in those of its champions, like the multifaceted scholar Allard Pierson, the militant atheist and Spinozist Johannes van Vloten, and the freethinker, teacher and social democrat A.H. Gerhard. This meaning of the word probably spread rapidly after 1860, and in the last quarter of the nineteenth century it occurred more frequently than *humanisme* as an open and rational, universally human religion. There are two reasons for this: in these years the lower and middle-class strict Protestants (de *gereformeerden*) started their struggle for emancipation against the more latitudinarian Protestant elite, and on the other hand the importance of atheism and the number of atheists in Dutch society started to grow. However, humanism in the sense of an open and rational, universally human religion did not disappear. The Lutheran theologian A.D. Loman was one of the people who continued to promote humanism in this way. As an offshoot of the enlightened liberal Protestantism that had become dominant in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic, this type of humanism was too firmly rooted to be wiped out easily.

Surprisingly enough, hardly any traces were found in dictionaries and *De Gids* of an *aesthetic* meaning of *humanisme* in the tradition of Menander, Plautus, Terence, many Renaissance humanists, and Winckelmann (Snell 1980). The one instance is the rejection by the important literary critic Conrad Busken Huet in 1863 of an aesthetically interpreted, individualistic, and elitist Renaissance humanism. It is not yet clear whether this absence of aesthetic humanism points to a characteristic of Dutch humanism or indicates a limitation of the sources used.

One can painstakingly try to take these senses of the word *humanisme* apart. Sometimes, however, this is almost impossible because authors mix meanings and use more than one of the denotations, connotations and associations that the concept has acquired in its complex development since Cicero used the words *humanus* and *humanitas* (Giustiniani 1985).

Of course, history did not stop in the nineteenth century, and the history of the word *humanisme* is only one angle on the subject. As yet, little research has been

carried out on the history of Dutch humanism after 1900. I will focus on some aspects that I am able to comment on. It is important to realize that there are many humanist groups and people that do not carry the label "humanist", but I will deal with the vicissitudes of some important organizations explicitly calling themselves *humanistisch*, and with the way humanism was and is expressed by them. This will give an opportunity to further clarify Dutch humanism. I start with *De Dageraad*, whose history goes back to the nineteenth century.

De Dageraad[3]

The first humanist organization to be founded in the Netherlands was *De Dageraad*, which means dawn or sunrise. It was founded in Amsterdam on October 12, 1856. At that time most of the founders were scientifically minded deists as far as worldview is concerned. They felt that God will reveal Himself when nature is investigated scientifically. In matters of politics, they were conservative liberals. Their goal was:

1 to search for the truth, led by nature and reason, and to distribute the results;
2 to advance the mutual understanding and brotherhood of kindred spirits;
3 to contribute in practice to the happiness of society.

After its foundation, *De Dageraad* developed quickly. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) turned out to be a catalyst for the debate on science and religion, and after 1865 the industrialization of the Netherlands brought the rise of a socialist labor movement. By 1880, most members of *De Dageraad* were not only atheists and materialists, admiring Jakob Moleschott, Ludwig Büchner and Ernst Haeckel, but also socialists with Marxist or anarchist leanings. Often they would think science proved that God did not exist, and often they saw a connection between atheism and socialism. The views of the teacher and social democrat A.H. Gerhard can serve as an example. His thinking ran as follows: freethinkers try to destroy the belief of the mass of the common people in a good God and in a heaven after this life. The freethinkers' striving to raise the consciousness of the majority of humanity about its real situation is cruel, if we do not at the same time work hard toward a society in which a good life here and now is possible for everybody, not just for the happy capitalist few (Gerhard 1885: 30).

De Dageraad was a small and brave, strongly atheist, anti-religious and anti-church organization fighting the Christian majority of the Netherlands. Some of the issues it focused on were the importance of science and free inquiry, the non-existence of God, the dangers of religion and mind-policing churches, the separation of church and state, the value of morals without God and the equal value of a non-religious and a religious oath in court or office. *De Dageraad* produced a large number of cheap pamphlets. One of them was *Dominee, pastoor of rabbi? Populaire kritiek* (Minister, priest or rabbi? Popular criticism), probably written by the Multatuli enthusiast J.G. ten Bokkel, and published anonymously in 1889. Within two years, more than 33,000 copies had been sold. The following passage from the preface to this pamphlet provides a good impression of the ideas of many Dutch freethinkers between 1880 and 1940:

> "The Association "De Dageraad", which for many years has published a periodical for the advancement of free thinking, has been trying of late through the distribution of pamphlets to open the eyes of the many to the light, which has reached the scholars some considerable time ago. [...]
> We are of the opinion that religion, as it is taught in our small country by ministers, priests, rabbis, etc., etc., in the end makes the people unhappy. Unhappy as a result of stupidity and ignorance.
> We, however, would like to see the people happy on this earth, happy through reason and science. For that reason, and for that reason only, we fight religion. [...]
> And therefore, reader, think and judge for yourself what looks like the truth to you, and do not be convinced by anything but arguments." (Ten Bokkel 1890: 3; translation by P.D.)

In the 1920s and 1930s *De Dageraad*, led by the cabinet-maker Jan Hoving, organized meetings in large theaters, which were attended by many hundreds. Membership rose to an all-time high of almost 2500, 1200 of which were in Amsterdam alone. In July 1931, Hoving organized a much publicized propaganda tour into the heart of the Catholic south. *De Dageraad*'s manifestations were directed not only against religion, but also against capitalism, fascism and Hitler's Nazism. In September 1929, in the first radio broadcast of the VRO (*Vrijdenkers Radio Omroep Vereeniging*, "Freethinkers Radio Broadcasting Association"), Hoving warned against Mussolini's fascism. The authorities made it impossible for him to finish his talk. They argued that he offended a friendly head of state and hurt the head of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1930s, the relationship of *De Dageraad* and the VRO with the Dutch government (a rather conservative and authoritarian Christian coalition) was decidedly bad. In 1934-1936, Hoving delivered six important radio speeches attacking anti-Semitism. At the end of 1936, the government closed down the VRO (Hoekman 1992). The freethinkers of *De Dageraad* in this period were among the most determined fighters against anti-Semitism, wherever it reared its ugly head, in the Netherlands, in Germany, or in the Soviet Union. They organized several protests against pogroms in the Ukraine and Russia.

At its foundation in 1856, *De Dageraad* regarded itself as the "church of the future" (Spigt, in Noordenbos & Spigt 1976: 158). Nonetheless, its attitude has been mainly that of a minority in a hostile environment. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the number of people in the Netherlands who were not members of a church was very low indeed: 0.1% in 1869 and 2.3% in 1899. This rose rapidly in the twentieth century to 8% in 1920 and 17% in 1947.[4] In 1957, after a hundred years, the name of *De Dageraad* was changed to *De Vrije Gedachte* ("Free Thought"). *De Dageraad/Vrije Gedachte* no doubt contributed much to the social and intellectual undermining of Christian belief in the Netherlands, especially before World War II. Now it is a small organization with less than a thousand members.[5]

Humanistisch Verbond

The organization that has largely determined the meaning of the Dutch concept of humanism in the second half of the twentieth century is the *Humanistisch Verbond* (HV, "Dutch Humanist Association"), founded on February 17, 1946. There were three main reasons for founding the HV. Firstly, there was a need to safeguard the right to exist of a non-religious humanist worldview and to think through and strengthen its philosophical foundations. In short, the HV wanted to fight for the emancipation of non-religious humanists. In the second place, the HV wanted to enhance and corroborate the largely implicit humanist worldviews of the substantial numbers of men and women who had left the church and had descended into nihilism. The churches had to raise the spiritual strength of the Christian believers, the new humanist organization had to do so for the growing number of Dutch people outside the churches. The underlying idea was that a conscious Christian or humanist conviction about what is important in life would have prevented the rise of Nazism and would prevent such gruesome movements coming to power in the future.

The third reason for the foundation of the HV was an elaboration and specification of the second reason. To the disappointment of its leaders, the Dutch Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP), founded in 1894, had never been able to win more than 30% of the votes in a national election. Because of a blockade by the Protestant and Roman Catholic parties, and because of its atheist image, the SDAP never really participated in a government coalition before World War II. After the war, the social democratic leaders wanted to change this situation. They therefore founded a new political party that would clearly be a people's party (not just for workers) and that would explicitly welcome Christian socialists. The SDAP before 1940 had been not just a political party but also a social, cultural and perhaps even spiritual home for a large part of the non-Christian left. The new *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA, "Labor Party"), founded on February 9, 1946, did its best to attract Christian members. Many of the founders of the HV were social democrats themselves and active in the new PvdA. They knew that this successor to the SDAP would organize its members on their political views only. Now that the social democratic party no longer wanted to provide a humanist worldview and spiritual home for the Dutch atheists and agnostics, another organization had to take on this role. This is why, according to J.P. van Praag, the foundation of the HV was "a necessary consequence" of the new setup of the social democratic party (1945). The foundation of the HV meant that the non-religious worker would no longer have to regard his political party as his church.

One question that has to be dealt with is why the founders of the HV did not try to reinvigorate *De Dageraad*. The teacher and social democratic politician J.P. van Praag, a central figure in the new organization, wrote in 1946 that an important difference was that *De Dageraad* emphasized the negative and unproductive fight against religion, whilst the main aim of the *Verbond* was to be a center of positive reflection and inspiration for the non-religious part of the population (Bonger 1956: 14). Van Praag judged that *De Dageraad* had reached a dead end and a new organization was needed to unite and inspire the 1,500,000 non-churchgoing Dutch.

In the summer of 1949 Van Praag and H.A. Polak-Schwarz visited the congress of the World Union of Freethinkers in Rome, where the two HV-observers found the same differences as between HV and *Dageraad*, but even more pronounced. When they thwart humanists and humanism in their development, churches and Christians have to be fought, but, like free thought, this fight is a means and not an end in itself. Most French and Italian freethinkers were stuck in a nineteenth-century mould and did not understand this at all. For many of them a fruitless (preaching to the converted), purely verbal and dogmatically atheist polemic with the churches was still the main goal. The representatives of the English and American Ethical Unions, and in many ways also those of *De Dageraad*, had a better understanding of modern humanism. Van Praag and Polak-Schwarz concluded that it would serve no purpose for the HV to join the World Union of Freethinkers. One of their reasons was given little emphasis in public, but they were also of the opinion that the World Union was too much under the influence of communists. This reason was rather important in the early years of the Cold War between Eastern Europe dominated by Russia, and Western Europe and North America dominated by the United States. The rejection of the World Union by the HV was one of the starting points for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), which was to be founded in Amsterdam in 1952.

Membership of the HV continued to expand until it reached about 12,000 in 1956, since when it has settled at between 12,000 and 16.000.[6] The history of the HV can be divided into two phases. In the period 1946-1965 it fought a successful struggle for emancipation as a worldview organization on behalf of non-Christian humanists, and atheists and agnostics in general. In 1965 one can say that it had completed this mission. An important factor in this success was not so much the size of the membership (which in view of the original expectations was disappointingly low) but the always very strategically formed board of the HV and its lobbying activities. Of decisive importance, of course, was the rapidly increasing number of people in the Netherlands who were not member of a church: 21% in 1960; 33% in 1966; 43% in 1979; 50% in 1980; and 60% in 1993 and 1997.[7] The Netherlands was no longer a Christian nation. Atheists were no longer regarded as second-rate citizens and as people without morals and conscience.

The period 1966-2001 can be characterized as the period in which the HV attempted to find a new mission, a new humanist program. This was difficult, because Dutch society after 1965 was very much a humanist society.[8] J.P. van Praag, president from September 1946 until May 1969, attempted with little success to present the struggle against nihilism, or the complete absence of a worldview, as the new publicly attractive main task. Personally he had always thought this was the main issue, or "the big fight". Of the presidencies after 1965, Rob Tielman's (1977-1987) was probably the most successful. He gave the HV a clear identity as the organization that promoted a worldview centered on the principle of self-determination of individuals, and that crusaded in favor of the legalization of abortion and euthanasia and against discrimination of homosexuals. These moral and political priorities of the HV were very well adapted to the views of its members and leadership, including important politicians such as

the conservative liberal Frits Bolkestein and the social democrat Klaas de Vries. On important issues, such as the arms race or social inequality, there were many differences among the humanists and among the non-Christian political parties in the Netherlands, but on desirable changes in laws and attitudes regarding abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, they were very much united. After Tielman's presidency, the HV's limited but clear and relevant identity again became diffuse. The continuing search for a new mission became even more difficult (although in some sense it may have become easier, because it had become almost impossible to deny its necessity) when in 1994, for the first time since 1918, the Netherlands got a government coalition that comprised not a single Christian party, and which adopted more liberal policies on euthanasia, prostitution, shop opening hours, and marriage and adoption by homosexuals (Trappenburg 2001). Many Dutch people saw this as confirmation that there was no further need for an HV after the successful emancipation struggle.

Two recurrent themes in debates on the humanism of the HV have been the relationship with Christianity, and non-theistic but religious humanism. These debates were emphatically not the same. In 1946 the HV decided that humanism is a worldview:

> "that, without presupposing the existence of a personal deity, is based on respect for the human being as a special part of the cosmic whole, as a bearer of a sense of norms that cannot be changed at will, and as a creator of and partaker in spiritual values" (Bonger 1956: 12; translation by P.D.).

In 1955, the relevant part of this declaration of the humanist principle was changed into:

> "The humanist life stance is characterized by the attempt to understand life and world by using human faculties and without starting from a special revelation" (Flokstra & Wieling 1986: 197-198; translation by P.D.).

In 1973, this was finally changed into:

> "Humanism is the life stance which tries to understand life and world with human faculties only. The faculty to judge and discriminate is deemed essential for a human being, and nobody or nothing outside of himself can be made responsible for this" (Flokstra & Wieling 1986: 197-198).

These words were phrased very carefully to make sure they did not exclude pantheists and very liberal Christians. Before 1965 the HV waged many public battles against Christian attempts at repression. In spite of the careful wording of its principles, the Dutch *humanisme* in this period acquired an association with atheism, and HV-membership came to reflect this. After 1965, the mutual opposition of non-theistic humanism and a large part of Dutch Christianity weakened. The difference in worldview between many traditional Christians and many non-theistic humanists has remained obvious. It is also true, however, that it turns out to be very hard to pin down precisely the difference between many

enlightened Christians and many broad-minded non-theistic humanists. As early as 1961, the famous Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx argued that the humanism of the HV as formulated in 1955 is a necessary prerequisite for any truly Christian belief. If Christians do not accept such humanist tenets as the ultimate personal responsibility for one's own life and decisions, they cannot really understand their own faith, and Christianity becomes superstition. But at the same time, Schillebeeckx wrote, Christians cannot accept humanism without God as offering a satisfactory and conclusive answer to questions about the meaning of life (Schillebeeckx 1961: 88). The beliefs of Dutch Christians and humanists have continued to change. More and more Dutch Christians wholeheartedly have accepted Enlightenment-inspired humanist principles, and more and more humanists have come to feel that the fight against Christianity and the churches is no longer a priority. In alliance with liberal and socially oriented Christians, these humanists would rather fight important social wrongs. Recent presidents of the HV (Jan Glastra van Loon, Marian Verkerk, and Liesbeth Mulder, but not Paul Cliteur) have often expressed this re-orientation. During the 1990s the HV's wavering policy in this respect has stood in the way of a clear identity and public image.

Right from the start the discussion about religious but non-theistic humanism has divided members of the HV. The issue came down to the difference between humanists who felt their sense of unity with the cosmos was essential and humanists who did not understand this. The issue was related to different views of the relationship between reason and emotion and of the importance of rituals. Piet Schut, a member of the national board of the HV from 1946 to 1955, forcefully defended religious humanism on many occasions. Other religious humanists in this sense were Han Sie Dhian Ho and J.P. van Praag. Van Praag played down his own religious humanism because of his strategic view of the role of the HV and his presidency, but he has always defended the legitimacy of non-theistic religious humanism within the HV.

Comparing the humanism of the *Humanistisch Verbond* with the humanism of *De Dageraad*, one might say that the main difference is that the HV—with Jaap van Praag at the center—always felt that it represented a large part, and possibly the majority, of Dutch society. The HV always wanted to be integrated into normal Dutch society, whereas *De Dageraad* and *De Vrije Gedachte* were always kicking against other groups and the culture they assumed to be dominant.[9]

Apart from its important role as the most visible defender and representative of humanism in Dutch society, the HV has tried to set up a structure for practical work to educate, guide and help the non-Christian part of the Dutch population. The successes in the struggle against nihilism were mainly to be found in this "practical humanism". This practical work was thought at the outset to consist of the formulation, elaboration and convincing presentation of a coherent humanist worldview by humanist leaders for the non-Christian mass in general. Later, from 1950, this work developed into the humanist counseling (*geestelijke verzorging*) of non-religious individuals in distress, and into humanist moral and spiritual education (*geestelijke vorming*) for small groups as well as in school settings.[10] Chapter 6 on humanist counseling deals with this in more detail.

For the training of the counselors (there were about 125 in 1960, mostly unpaid volunteers) the HV published written material, organized conferences and started a crash course. In 1963 it was decided to continue this course in a permanent training center for humanist counselors and educators, the *Humanistisch Opleidings Instituut* (HOI, "Humanist Training Institute"). From 1989 this institute was state-financed as an accredited university in the same way as the Roman Catholic and Protestant theological universities. Among other things, this meant that a research task was added to the institute's mission. The name was changed to *Universiteit voor Humanistiek* (UvH, "University for Humanistics"). More information on the university and an interesting part of its curriculum can be found in chapter 9.

Last but not least, since the 1960s many primary schools have allowed the HV to offer humanist moral and spiritual education (*humanistisch vormingsonderwijs*, HVO) in the classroom, as an alternative to religious education by a Christian minister or priest, according to pupil or parental preference. In 2000 HVO was offered to 35,000 pupils in 2500 schools. In 1980, the HV started a new foundation that is now called *Pedagogisch Studiecentrum Humanistisch Vormings Onderwijs*, to train the HVO-educators.

Many Dutch citizens have come into contact with the HV through its practical activities. And even if they did not know or understand what else the HV was doing, they remained sympathetic to it because of this practical humanism.

Humanitas

Another important humanist organization is Humanitas, founded on May 31, 1945, immediately after the German occupying forces withdrew from the Netherlands. It was originally called the "Foundation for social services on a humanist basis", but soon the name Humanitas, which was the title of its magazine, was universally used. In 1948 Humanitas became a member-based organization. The founders had three goals. Firstly, human dignity had to be restored after World War II. Secondly, a change was deemed necessary in the way social services were rendered to people: they must be approached as human beings with dignity, and not in the pre-war tradition of paternalistic Christian charity and poor-relief. Joris in 't Veld, president of Humanitas from 1945 to 1963, and Dutch Secretary of Reconstruction and Housing from 1948 to 1951, expressed it as follows:

> "True aid is only offered by someone who regards the person in need as a fellow human being, and who is prepared to stand by him. Not aid offered condescendingly, but aid born of a sense of solidarity, of responsibility, also for the destiny of the fellowman in distress." (quotation from 1953 in Zwierstra 1995: 11; translation by P.D.).

Thirdly, churches gave aid to their members first and to other people later. Humanitas was founded by individuals active in the social democratic, largely non-Christian labor movement who wanted an alternative to the aid traditionally given by the Christian parishes. Humanitas aimed to promote social services

"among all groups of the population, especially also those groups that do not belong to a church" (Zwierstra 1995: 18; translation by P.D.).

The founders of Humanitas and the HV did not know of each other's plans, and when they did it was too late. Soon after both organizations had been founded their boards made several attempts to achieve a merger and close cooperation. Van Praag and In 't Veld were very much united in this. All these attempts failed, however, because the rank and file of Humanitas voted against it. An important reason for the failure was that the HV was perceived as extremely atheist, while Humanitas included a significant number of liberal Protestants. Another reason was that the HV, certainly after 1947, did not like Humanitas's tendency to identify humanism with socialism. In theory Humanitas, like the HV, was politically neutral, and Humanitas took great pains to create a neutral impression. In fact, however, it was very much a social democratic organization, like the HV but even more so. Another possible reason for the failure of the merger was, that in June 1946, In 't Veld proposed that Humanitas would become a special subordinate organization providing practical social services on a humanist basis, and the HV would become the general humanist organization responsible for the further development of this humanist basis (Zwierstra 1995: 26). Many members of Humanitas could not stomach this. Organizations have their own dynamics, and the members of Humanitas could not accept the idea that Humanitas was to be a "daughter" of the HV. The trivial fact that Humanitas was founded a little earlier than the HV also became important in this context. A final reason for the failure was the ambiguous feelings of many Humanitas-members about the "humanist basis" of the social services Humanitas was offering. Many members of Humanitas thought the humanist basis should be interpreted in the sense of "universally human", and therefore, they thought, worldviews did not matter. Moreover, according to its constitution, Humanitas was meant to help and support all needy people, not just humanists or members of the HV.

In 1955, an organizational committee proposed to strengthen and clarify the humanist basis of Humanitas and again to link Humanitas to the HV. This led to a fierce discussion that lasted until 1959. The Rotterdam branch proposed deleting the humanist basis from the statutes. For the social services rendered by Humanitas, it did not matter whether the solidarity with other people sprang from a religious belief or a humanist worldview. Social work based on a worldview was out of date. Modern social work was based on scientific knowledge. Most of the professionals employed by Humanitas welcomed the proposal from Rotterdam. They had been employed without being asked for their humanist credentials and if humanism played a role in their work, it was only implicitly. In 't Veld argued that the Dutch government would give money to Humanitas only if it was an organization with a humanist identity. The Department of Social Affairs, headed by a Roman Catholic secretary, did not subsidize neutral private organizations at this time, and strongly supported organizations on a worldview basis. Finally, the 1959 congress of Humanitas unanimously decided to strike the phrase "on a humanist basis" out of the official name of the organization, but at the same time to clarify the humanist principle in article 2 of its statutory regulations. The main elements in this augmented article were a non-dogmatic approach, a focus on people who are not a member of a church,

adherence to the "general humanist" principle of respect for the human person and to its corollaries of self-determination and self-development of each human being, constrained by the interests of society. The 1959 decision did not really bring the discussion to an end. The debate on the humanist basis of the activities of Humanitas has continued to flare up regularly.

It is impossible to provide a satisfactory description of the development of the work executed by the volunteers and professionals of Humanitas in this chapter. The matter is complicated, especially in view of constantly changing government policy and the necessity for Humanitas to respond to it. Broadly speaking, it can be said that until 1955 Humanitas worked mainly with volunteers and a few paid professionals. From 1955 to the beginning of the 1970s, the number of salaried professionals increased spectacularly, as a result of rising government subsidies. In 1955 Humanitas employed a little more than one hundred professionals, and in 1970 their number had grown to 1732, of which 1459 worked as home-helpers. In the same period, membership of Humanitas increased from 10,000 to 35,000. In 1970 the government started to force the many private organizations rendering social services into mergers to become large professional institutions. Compared with the Christian organizations, Humanitas was very small and the influence of Humanitas in this work diminished considerably, to the extent that it almost disappeared. The private organizations for social work based on a worldview, including Humanitas, started to concentrate on community development, which was defined by the government as the activation of worldview groups to the field of welfare improvement. Humanitas did not like the separation of social services and community development, and the fact that community development had to be based on a worldview re-ignited the debate on the organization's humanist basis. The champions of community development based on a humanist worldview, led by the president and former HV-board member Stempels, won the debate within Humanitas on how to respond to the new government policy. Humanitas started community development in the sectors it was familiar with, e.g. after-care of prisoners and welfare work for older people. The focus on volunteers was re-established because of the government's refusal to finance professional community development workers, except for the training and support of volunteers. The relationship between volunteers and professionals has been a complicated problem for Humanitas throughout its history.

After 1980, Humanitas slid into a long crisis. It started new social services, but membership decreased rapidly from 37,000 in 1973 to 27,000 in 1984, and the decline continued. Members were also aging. The organizational structure was unwieldy, and financial problems arose. In 1987 the provincial government of Friesland stopped subsidizing Humanitas's work in community development. The alarm bell started ringing. A period of reconsideration and reorganization followed, culminating in an extraordinary general meeting in March 1994. The decisions taken in this meeting enabled a relieved Humanitas to make a new start.

In the meantime, Humanitas has developed into an organization that provides social services in the context of community development, and supports community development by providing social services. Humanitas organizes projects and

activities that empower people in socially excluded or marginal positions to rebuild social networks and to regain their place as full members of society, through their own strengths and capabilities and with the right to shape their own lives to their own liking. Some examples of these projects and activities: summer camps for the children of families who cannot afford to go on holidays; a buddy-project and friendship-circles for people with a mental disability; projects for unemployed people to help them regain self-respect; projects and assistance for the homeless; and many projects for migrants and refugees to assist them in integrating into Dutch society. The work of Humanitas is carried out by approximately 10,000 volunteers in five districts and eighty local branches. The volunteers are coordinated, trained and supported by about two hundred paid professionals. Humanitas now has approximately 15,000 financially contributing members.

In the course of its history, Humanitas has started a number of separate foundations that have become very important in their own right. Two examples are the organization for aid to underprivileged children (*Stichting Kinderopvang Humanitas*), now with 1400 paid workers, and the organization in Rotterdam for older people's care and housing (*Stichting Humanitas Rotterdam*), now with 1750 paid staff members and 800 volunteers.[11]

Compared with the HV, Humanitas represents a very practical type of humanism, which one might call moral or political, and which even has an aversion to ideological debate and abstract worldviews. The motto of Humanitas is: "Do what you have to do!" The implicit nature of the humanism of Humanitas and the pragmatic attitude of many of its members and professionals have ensured that this humanism has never been secure. However, the humanist basis of the work of Humanitas has remained constant over time, in spite of several attempts from the inside to get rid of it.[12]

Hivos and Other Humanist Organizations

Hivos

In January 1968 the *Humanistisch Verbond* and the *Weezenkas* ("Orphans Fund") founded HIVOS (*Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*, "Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation").[13] Some time later, Humanitas joined as the third founding organization. A decisive role was played by L.I. de Winter, who had for a considerable time been the successful director of the life insurance company *Aurora*, which was owned by the *Weezenkas*. De Winter made two million Dutch guilders available to the *Weezenkas* for the purpose of founding HIVOS (Hoekman & Houkes 1998).

Hivos (its name is spelled with only one capital nowadays) supports organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Southeast Europe. These organizations are active in the six policy fields chosen by Hivos: economy and credit facilities; culture and the arts; women and development; environment and sustainable development; human rights and aids; information and communication technology (ICT).

Since 1978, Hivos has been spending far more money than in its first decade, because of the decision in that year by the Secretary for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk, to admit Hivos to the Dutch co-financing program, in which a limited number of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) receive tax money to spend on development goals. The Dutch Department for Development Cooperation delegates in this way 10% of its development effort. Of this 10%, Hivos received 15% in 2000, which amounted to almost sixty million euros. The Hivos' head office is in The Hague. There are regional offices in Zimbabwe (Harare), Costa Rica (San José) and India (Bangalore). As an active member of Dutch and European networks (including Alliance 2015, Eurostep, and the South-North Federation), Hivos lobbies for a foreign policy that gives consideration to the interests of developing countries.

Before 1978, the main co-financing NGO's were a Roman Catholic organization, now called Cordaid, a Protestant organization, ICCO, and a nominally neutral organization: Novib. One of the main reasons for the foundation of Hivos in 1968 was the refusal by Novib to commit itself to a non-Christian ideology and focus.[14] Novib continued to spend most of its money through explicitly Christian channels, augmenting the funding from Roman Catholic and Protestant co-financing organizations. The policy of Hivos is based on humanist principles such as personal responsibility for one's actions, the right of individuals to self-determination, and the advocacy of a pluralist and tolerant society. Hivos assumes that poverty is a consequence of unequal opportunities and an unfair distribution of knowledge, power, production and income—on a global scale and within national states. It feels that the world can become a sustainable and fair place to live only if more people have access to the resources and the decision-making processes that determine their future. Hivos wants to increase opportunities for people in developing countries and give them greater scope to develop themselves. NGOs in developing countries play a key role in this. The humanist development organization supports NGOs that support groups of citizens who defend their own interests and who fight for human rights and a better democracy, thus helping to shape an active and resilient society. These ideas certainly can be linked to humanist values and principles, but they are not exclusive to Hivos. Novib, Cordaid and ICCO nowadays subscribe to similar ideas and there is a fair amount of cooperation between Hivos and these organizations.

Though Hivos has not known the same number and intensity of conflicts about its humanist basis as Humanitas, one may say that there is a certain similarity in the humanist character of these organizations. Both are explicitly humanist, but the practical nature of their goals makes them both rather unwilling to spend much time debating and formulating their humanism. It is also clear that for Humanitas and Hivos, humanism is primarily a moral and political movement.[15]

Other Humanist Organizations

So far we have met the following explicitly humanist organizations:

- Dageraad/Vrije Gedachte;
- Weezenkas;

- Humanitas;
- Stichting Kinderopvang Humanitas;
- Stichting Humanitas Rotterdam;
- Humanistisch Verbond;
- Hivos;
- Universiteit voor Humanistiek;
- Pedagogisch Studiecentrum Humanistisch Vormings Onderwijs.

There have been and are many more. I will mention a selection of the others:

- Socrates (a humanist foundation that establishes and maintains extraordinary professorships at state universities);
- Steunfonds Humanisme ("Support Fund for Humanism", a fund-raising organization);
- Humanistische Omroep Stichting ("Humanist Broadcasting Foundation");
- Humanistisch Overleg Mensenrechten ("Humanist Committee on Human Rights");
- Humanistisch Vredesberaad ("Humanist Peace Council");
- Humanistisch Archief;
- Humanist Media Support (provider of internet services and media products; website: http://www.human.nl/).

Two remarks have to be made on this proliferation of humanist organizations. Firstly, these organizations are very much related to one another. As we saw, Hivos was founded by the *Weezenkas*, *Humanistisch Verbond* and Humanitas. This pattern, in all kinds of variations, is not unusual. Secondly, what is the explanation for this large number of humanist organizations? Part of the explanation must be found in the pluralist character of Dutch society and the specific way in which this pluralism has been organized since 1860. Sociologists and historians have often referred to this dynamic phenomenon of segregation by the word "pillarization" (*verzuiling* or *verzuildheid* in Dutch). In essence it means that society is divided into "pillars": a Protestant, a Roman Catholic, a socialist and perhaps a rather diffuse and underdeveloped liberal or neutral. The leaders of each pillar had the task of reaching agreement with the leaders of other pillars on issues of common concern or national interest.[16] This pillarized system, strongly present during the period 1917-1965, was connected with a specific interpretation of the constitutional separation of church and state. In the Netherlands, this separation does not prevent the government spending tax money on the facilities and activities of churches and similar institutions. What it does mean is that the government may only provide money to worldview organizations if it treats all of them in a just and proportionally equal way. This arrangement has had important effects for the humanist movement. When in 1946 the HV started its campaign for the equal treatment of atheist and agnostic Dutch citizens, it was able to use the constitution as a lever to acquire government funds for all kinds of humanist activities. Because, for example, the government gave money to a Protestant and Roman Catholic development organization, it could almost be forced by law to give money to a humanist development organization, too. And so on. The main trouble for the humanist organizations in this respect was to be recognized as being different from the churches, but at the same time being broadly similar. Eventually the HV was very successful in this.

The large number of professionals Humanitas was able to enlist in the 1960s were also the result of the pillar-system. It is doubly ironic that the humanist organizations have benefited so much from this pillar-system. They actually started to benefit at a time when the system began to fall apart. And ideologically speaking, humanists do not really like and never have liked the system of pillars. The humanist worldview prefers individuals to make up their own minds and to decide for themselves what other people they want to associate with. The "pillarization" (*verzuildheid*) can be, and was, regarded as a system that imprisons people within the confines of the group "they belong to". The general "depillarization" (*ontzuiling*) that started in 1965 was a process, then, that increased the freedom of the individual, which was regarded by most humanists as a boon. But the same process destroyed the financial system that was so beneficial to humanist organizations.

The financial problems of some humanist organizations have contributed to the success of recent attempts to create a stronger institutional cooperation within the humanist movement. The *Humanistisch Kenniscentrum* ("Humanist Knowledge Center") was founded early in 2000, and was instrumental in the merger of the two scholarly humanist journals *Rekenschap* and the *Tijdschrift voor Praktische Humanistiek*. They were replaced by the *Tijdschrift voor Humanistiek—Journal for Humanistics*. At the end of 2001, ten humanist organizations—among them the *Humanistisch Verbond*, Humanitas, Hivos, the University for Humanistics and *De Vrije Gedachte*—decided to form a *Humanistische Alliantie* ("Humanist Alliance"). This loosely structured alliance aims at closer cooperation of the humanist organizations in the Netherlands. The aim is to bring about a clearer and more publicly visible identity of the humanist movement, starting from the many successful practical activities of the humanist organizations and emphasizing the affinities between them.

The Changing Meaning of "Humanism"

Recalling the nineteenth-century meanings of the Dutch word *humanisme*, we can say that the pedagogical meaning has practically disappeared in the Netherlands. It certainly doesn't play a substantial role in the humanism of the organizations calling themselves *humanistisch*, including that of the Pedagogical Study Center for Humanist Moral and Spiritual Education.

It would be a reasonable guess that Erasmus of Rotterdam alone would succeed in keeping the Renaissance meaning of the word in the air. Renaissance humanism is a historical phenomenon, studied by a large international community of scholars who generally try to do so independently of humanism as a worldview or a moral and political effort. New Dutch translations of the writings not only of Erasmus but also of Petrarch, Thomas More, Rabelais, and Montaigne continue to be published. There is no doubt that Renaissance humanism continues to inspire today's Dutch humanists. The question is rather: how exactly? Many Dutch humanist intellectuals admiringly refer to Renaissance humanists, but they do so in different ways. The Renaissance humanists are used to bolster up present-day interpretations of humanism as a worldview and as a moral com-

mitment. Fons Elders uses the work of Renaissance thinkers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola to promote a humanist worldview that bridges the gap between nature and culture, between cosmology and anthropology, a gap which he criticizes in the humanism of J.P. van Praag (Elders 1996). Wim van Dooren interprets the Aristotelian philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi, Christian in name but hardly in position, as a forerunner of the nineteenth-century freethinkers and atheists. More so than Elders, Van Dooren realizes that not all Renaissance thinkers can be called Renaissance humanists (Van Dooren 1991; Nauert 1995: 59-68). Harry Kunneman refers to Montaigne's humanism to show that giving attention to bodies, to local and historical contexts, and to differences between people is part of the humanist tradition. Therefore, according to him, there is no necessary contradiction between humanism and postmodernism (Kunneman 1993: 68).

The moral or political meaning of humanism is clearly alive in the humanist organizations of the Netherlands. *Humanistisch Verbond*, Humanitas, Hivos, and all the others regularly use h-words to express their humanitarian strivings and their activities aimed at a more humane society. The worldview meaning of humanism also has remained very much present in Dutch humanism, sometimes in the militantly atheist version (as in Paul Cliteur's newspaper columns), but more often in an open variety. In this context it is important to be aware of recent changes in Dutch society and in the way worldviews are conceptualized and studied. I already mentioned the fact that Dutch society is no longer Christian. It is now an intercultural and multicultural society in which only 37% of its citizens are members of a Christian church or regard themselves as Muslim (Becker & De Wit 2000: 73). But there is more: in 1999, 45 to 60% of the church members went to church only a few times a year, if at all. Between 1979 and 1995, men and women who were a member of a Christian church but did not subscribe to the central tenets of the Christian belief, increased in number. Since 1985 the group of non-believing church members has become even larger than the group of traditional Christian believers in the churches.[17] We might be evolving towards a situation in which the large churches have disappeared, leaving a large number of smaller churches with a more conscious, convinced and "orthodox" membership. And what do Dutch people believe who are not a member of a Christian church and not a Muslim? Fewer than 10% of them have traditional Christian beliefs. The others have (implicit) beliefs about freedom, determinism and chance, about the malleability and manageability of human life and society, about the (possibility and methods of) justification of moral positions and claims to truth, about what is important in life, about purposes and values, about retaining one's self-respect and personal identity (Baumeister 1991; Elders 1999). They are no nihilists. They want to decide for themselves what to believe in. They are members of all kinds of organizations, but in most cases these are not organizations that provide them with an all-encompassing worldview. One might say that they all have a "meaning frame" (*zingevingskader*), but only some have a "worldview" (*levensbeschouwing*). A meaning frame is a set of experiences, principles, values and views that makes a person feel that her or his life is meaningful. This set may be largely implicit and only have a limited coherence, but it is there and it works. A worldview is a

meaning frame that is more conscious, more explicit, and has been improved in terms of internal consistency and external relevance (Hijmans 1994). Of the non-churchgoing Dutch, the overwhelming majority, about half the total population, has a non-Christian meaning frame, but it is very hard to pin down precisely what it means, often also for these people themselves. Meaning frames and worldviews can be highly personal, but even then they can also be shared by many, to a certain extent. Most Dutch people have meaning frames that have a lot of common characteristics, not because they adhere to the same worldview-organization, but because they have lived through the same social changes. Research has shown, for instance, that since 1979 the Dutch in general have come to think less of traditional family ties and the traditional division of labor between men and women. They now think more important issues are: their own career; freedom to enjoy life; freedom of speech and expression; and individual freedom in matters of life and death (e.g. abortion and euthanasia) (Felling, Peters & Scheepers 2000).

Because they have a better understanding of the way in which people nowadays give meanings to their lives (and did so in the past?), and because they are aware of the prime value of individual freedom in present-day Dutch society, many Dutch humanists are on the alert when talking about humanism as a worldview. A humanist worldview is not something to be handed down the generations as a complete and finished, collectively celebrated package. It is more a task than a traditional result. Many Dutch humanists realize that they "have", or rather "live", a largely implicit meaning frame, and that it is hard work to create and express a coherent worldview of their own. From these empirical and conceptual considerations, we are in a position to reformulate J.P. van Praag's fight against nihilism. He thought it very important to a vital society for most people to develop their largely implicit meaning frames into more conscious worldviews, and to share and discuss them with others.

One of the more important and interesting debates in Dutch humanism at the beginning of the twenty-first century is about the status and content of humanism as a meaning frame and a worldview, and its precise relation to humanism as a moral and political effort towards a more humane society. In the organizations joining forces in the Humanist Alliance, the humanitarian meaning of humanism and the worldview meaning will have to find a common understanding in some way.

4 Humanist Historiography of Dutch Organized Humanism

Amanda Kluveld

"The image of humanism in past and present is
not in the least clear and defined"
Jaap van Praag (Van Praag 1956: 219)

Writing the history of an individual life, one's organization, or one's nation, is part of constructing and interpreting one's identity. This is why, to concur with historian Simon Schama, it is a mistake to think of history as nothing more than a story about the past. The historian, whether professional or amateur, is touched by his time, contemporaries, and history. These aspects of his life form the context for a powerful influence on his vision of the past. The story he writes about the past cannot be seen as a record of the past, but only as an interpretation of it. Sometimes the history he writes tells even more about the present than about times gone by.

All this was pointed out in *The Invention of Tradition*, the well-known study by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger which was devoted largely to all kinds of national history (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). But inventing traditions with the aim of presenting a vision on the present is not unique to national histories. It also happens in all manner of books and articles written to commemorate a certain event or to celebrate an important anniversary of an organization. This specific genre of historiography often serves to tell something about the present identity of the organization concerned, and therefore about its self-image. The Dutch historian Jos Perry clearly pointed all this out in his study on this genre of historiography, for which he chose the appropriate title: *We commemorate, therefore we are* (Perry 1999).

A link between historiography, commemoration, identity, and self-image is also made by those who have written or are writing the history of organized humanism in the Netherlands. A study of the historiography of Dutch organized humanism reveals the parts of this history that have been emphasized or neglected. One can try to find out why the story about the past is told in this specific way, and to determine what self-image is hidden beneath the surface. One can also write a history of this self-image by comparing the different ways in which the history of Dutch organized humanism has been approached over the years.

Writing the history of a historiography leads in this way to a history of the self-image and identity of humanism in the Netherlands. This self-image is relevant today. Partly because it has contributed to the identity of Dutch humanist organizations as they exist today, and partly because it contributes to a historiography of humanism in the Netherlands that, rather than being static, is dynamic and open for reflection and dialogue. In this chapter , I will make a start with this kind of historiography to learn more about the self-image and identity of

Dutch organized humanism, and about the role writings about the past have played and are playing in constructing, developing, and maintaining all this.

The Epic Approach

Personal memories and texts written for the occasion of a commemoration or anniversary by or on behalf of what could be referred to as the founding fathers, are often the first studies on the history of an organization or movement. Inspired by the historiography of the Dutch occupation and resistance during World War II, which distinguishes several phases and approaches in commemorating important events, we refer to such studies as "epic".

Some examples of the epic approach to the historiography of Dutch organized humanism can be found in the jubilee edition of *Rekenschap*, a humanist magazine devoted to historical and philosophical reflections on humanism. A typical article is the one entitled *Bouwstenen tot de geschiedenis van het Humanistisch Verbond* (Building Blocks for the History of the Dutch Humanist Association) written by the Dutch humanist H. Bonger (Bonger 1956). At first glance, Bonger's contribution seems to be a detailed chronicle of the first ten years of the Dutch Humanist Association. There are descriptions of important meetings as well as the members present. But writing a chronicle was not Bonger's first concern. A closer look at his contribution shows that the author wrote his study to define the task for future historians who one day, he assumed, would want to write the history of the Dutch Humanist Association. At least, Bonger's contribution contains explicit instructions for these future chroniclers:

> "A chronicle of events is always a dry enumeration of external facts. Capturing these facts, however, is an essential activity because it provides the material that can be used for the future historian. This historian can and will try to give an idea of the past. This image is external and subjective as well, because no one knows how it really was. This subjectivity results, among other things, from the fact that the historian neither knows the circumstances in and through which facts come about, nor the emotions that accompanied them." (Bonger 1956; translation by A.K.).

According to Bonger, neither a positivistic approach to the past nor a more hermeneutic historiography are possible. However, the author does argue for historiography written with empathy. In his historical narrative, Bonger points out the direction for the future historian. He does this by dividing the history of Dutch organized humanism into a prehistory (the history of humanism before the foundation of the Dutch Humanist Association) and contemporary history (the history of the Dutch Humanist Association). His historical narrative ends with the statement that Dutch organized humanists still have to strive to the utmost to achieve the goal he thinks is most important: to be taken seriously by members of parliament. Bonger repeats his statement with explicit advice to the future historian:

> "May the chronicler of today advise the historian of the future. When he writes the history of the first ten years [of the Dutch Humanist Association] he should reckon with the work of four persons: J.P. van Praag, the inspirer, F. van den Berkhof, the organizer, J. Brandt Corstius, the imaginer, C.H. Schonk, the reliever of distress" (Bonger 1956: 67; translation by A.K.).

The inspirer, the organizer, the imaginer, and the reliever of distress. It almost looks like a list of the founders of the boarding school for sorcerers described in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books which are now so popular. Bonger's chronicle evokes an even more archaic image, namely that of the patriarchs. Anyway, Bonger's advice to the future historian seems to be a spur for an epic historical narrative, an epic historiography inspired more by biblical tradition than Greek mythology. This seems to be confirmed by one final piece of advice by Bonger to future historians. They should be aware that the founders of the Dutch Humanist Association were stunned and irritated by the fact that their opponents in Dutch society seemed to be unable to feel the importance of ethical law, which, according to Bonger, was so adequately described in Matthew 7:12.
This direct reference to a Christian text shows the archaic tendency of Bonger's chronicle. This must have given little satisfaction to the anti-clerical and sometimes fanatically anti-religious humanists of the time. The reference to the Bible indicated that the humanists lacked a tradition of their own that they could be proud of and appeal to. It is therefore hardly surprising that the epic approach in the historiography of Dutch organized humanism—for which Bonger's chronicle is exemplary—was followed by a phase that can be described as a search for humanist forerunners. The prehistory of the Dutch Humanist Association, as Bonger called it, had to be transformed into a venerable and glorious past, a tradition based on other than biblical words and thoughts. The existence of Dutch organized humanism had to be made legitimate by this tradition and had to be presented as a logical development of the history of ideas.

The Search for Forerunners and Tradition

The approach in historiography of finding forerunners and a glorious tradition for Dutch humanism partly emanated from the epic approach and partly ran parallel with it. In 1961, five years after the jubilee edition of *Rekenschap*, a new study on humanism was published, entitled *Modern niet-godsdienstig humanisme* (Modern non-religious humanism) (Engelen 1961). This study contained articles by various authors, written with the aim of bridging the gap between humanism and Christianity. Both humanism and Christianity should understand each other better, and the book was written to provide a dialogue between them, the editor claimed. Although *Modern niet-godsdienstig humanisme* is not a historiography, references to the history of humanism are by no means absent. In fact, these references play an important role in the studies of the different authors. They were needed to present modern humanism as a more or less consistent worldview and as a powerful and important movement rooted in cultural history and the history of philosophy. This was no easy task. W. Banning, for ex-

ample, not a humanist himself but a modernist protestant thinker (and therefore very much interested in new movements with a focus on the human being and not on the church as an institution), tried to outline what he called *the* background of *the* Dutch humanism. The problem with this aim is, or so the author tells us, the impossibility of referring to Dutch humanism. One cannot speak of a typical form of humanism that arose only from typical Dutch thoughts and philosophies and was grown only in the soil of Dutch culture, the author states. Dutch humanism arose from orientations on classic thinkers, from philosophers, literature, and art in Italy, France, England, and Germany. Humanism developed itself from a strong dedication to the study of humanities, and from at least equally strong efforts to combine the wisdom and truth of the *paideia* with the gospel. When, Banning states, Dutch non-religious humanists considered Erasmus and Coornhert as their patron saints, they actually encountered content that failed to match the description they were looking for. Erasmus and Coornhert, for example, did not exclude Christian revelation from their thoughts as the modern non-religious humanist did, or at least tried to do in some way or other. It is not easy for the modern humanist to connect his view with these forerunners.

Banning therefore considers it important to distinguish the different forms of humanism that have existed in the Netherlands:

1 the Christian humanism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, associated with Erasmus, Hendricus Geldorpius, Willem Gnafeus, Peter Bloccius, Wessel Gansfoort and Johannes Anastasius Veluanus. These thinkers are considered to be humanist because they are advocates of the humanities;
2 the Libertines, who played an important role during the Dutch Revolt (also known as The Eighty Year War) in the seventeenth century, as well as Spinoza, the first non-Christian humanist;
3 the Rationalist humanism of the eighteenth century, with such exponents as Justus van Effen, Francois Hemsterhuis, and Jan Derk van der Capellen;
4 the nineteenth-century modernist theologians and atheists.

The fifth manifestation of Dutch humanism that Banning distinguishes is the Dutch Humanist Association. Banning states that his contemporaries in the Dutch Humanist Association tended to see continuity between Dutch humanism of the former ages and the humanism of the Dutch Humanist Association. Banning thinks it is more appropriate to see this humanism as a break. Never before was humanism born of a need to fight nihilism and demoralization such as resulted from World War II. Never before had so many people been alienated from church and religion. Never before was there so much need for humanism as presented and developed by the Dutch Humanist Association.

Where Banning hesitates to advise humanists to lean on forerunners, the humanist Bonger, who also contributed to *Modern niet-godsdienstig humanisme*, is less hesitant to embrace past thinkers as part of his own humanist tradition. He sees little difference between humanists of the past and his fellow humanists in the Dutch Humanist Association. In fact, where Banning is hesitant to reduce different forms of humanism to a common denominator, Bonger chooses to emphasize the existence of continuity in the history of humanism:

> "In this extremely transitory sketch I have tried to point out that from antiquity on there has been an often interrupted and weak, but nonetheless clear, development of the human being who develops his talents and transforms himself into a cultural rather than a natural being. In this way he creates in himself an environment in which it is possible to live a life worth living [...]."(Bonger 1961: 29; translation by A.K.).

Six years later, in 1961, the humanist Anton Constandse outlined a far stronger bond between humanism and a development towards freedom in history than had ever been done before. In his *Geschiedenis van het humanisme in Nederland* (History of humanism in the Netherlands) he stated:

> "In the history of our culture, an increasing endeavor for an intellectual liberation revealed itself. This endeavor was opposed to believing based on authority, obsolete traditions, and rigid dogma. It was demanded of every line of reasoning that it should justify itself. This longing for emancipation was humanistic as long as it based its judgment on reason, objective experience, and the need for joy of life." (Constandse 1978: 7; translation by A.K.).

In his *Geschiedenis van het humanisme in Nederland*, Constandse outlines a long history of Dutch humanist thinkers from the Middle Ages onward, and the influence of international philosophers on their thoughts. Among the important humanists, in his view, were Geert Grote, Erasmus, Descartes, Tyssot de Patot, Frans Junghuhn, Johannes van Vloten, Multatuli, Busken Huet, Allard Pierson, and Domela Nieuwenhuis. All because they emphasized just what Constandse considered to be the main features of humanism: freedom of thought, reason and antidogmatism. At the end of his study, Constandse stated that the Dutch Humanist Association represented millions of non-religious people in Dutch society. He concluded that the Dutch government supported churches, clergy and theologians far more than Dutch humanism. And it was this humanism that Constandse considered to be an important motor for social and cultural development in Dutch society.

In Constandse's *Geschiedenis van het Humanisme in Nederland*, one can find a certain tension between his view of the history of Dutch humanism before the twentieth century and Dutch organized humanism as it was in his day. This tension can be found in his interpretation of humanism as a movement of elite intellectual thinkers who, in their own specific way, gave birth to new impulses for intellectual freedom based on reason. Dutch organized humanism in Constandse's time was not really an elite group as, at least according to the historiography, had been formed by humanists in bygone ages. The Dutch Humanist Association was a social and cultural movement that represented a huge and differentiated group of non-believers. It was not exclusively a selected group of prominent intellectuals operating on their own. It therefore was not especially easy to link the founding fathers, as described by Bonger in 1956, directly to the great thinkers mentioned in this historiography of forerunners. This problem remains unsolved in Constandse's study.

This is also true for the study that was edited thirteen years later in 1991 by the humanists Paul Cliteur and Wim van Dooren. In this *Geschiedenis van het*

humanisme. Hoofdfiguren uit de humanistische traditie (History of humanism. Leading figures from the humanist tradition) the authors attempted to explore the question of whether humanism can be considered as a rival, a counterpart, or a completion of religions or ideologies (Cliteur & Van Dooren 1991).

Cliteur and Van Dooren considered a historiography of humanism to be important in answering this question. They distinguished how the term "humanism" has had a different meaning in different ages, and stated that it was therefore necessary to speak of many humanisms. As we pointed out before, this was also the view of the protestant Banning in *Modern niet-godsdienstig humanisme.* In *Geschiedenis van het humanisme* Cliteur and Van Dooren decidedly chose to differentiate between humanism and Dutch organized humanism. Following Banning, and to a certain extent Constandse, they defined the first form of humanism as classical humanism that was concerned with *paideia*, human dignity, and self-expression, or with classical and Renaissance philosophy. The second form of humanism, which they considered to be contemporary humanism, was in their opinion an organized non-religious worldview with its roots in the nineteenth century.

This view on contemporary humanism was largely inspired by *The humanist tradition of the west* by the British historian Allan Bullock, in which he defined humanism as a refusal to accept a determinist or reductionist view: an insistence that in some measure men and women, if they do not enjoy complete freedom, nonetheless have it in their grasp to make choices in the scholarly tradition of humanism, relating to Greek classical and Renaissance ideas rather than to humanism in, for example, the humanist organizations (Bullock 1985).

Geschiedenis van het humanisme, edited by Cliteur and Van Dooren, is an important example of humanist historiography in the Netherlands. It was one of the studies that eventually led the way to a carefully considered decision to differentiate between forerunners of the humanist tradition in a distant past and a clearer view on the development of humanist emancipation movements in the nineteenth century, that was closer both in time and in form to the Dutch organized humanism of the twentieth century. All this was based on Bullock's study, which was neither written by an insider of Dutch organized humanism, nor based only on commonly known Dutch and German studies on the history of philosophy. *Geschiedenis van het humanisme* can be considered an example of a historical narrative desisting from an internal and even defensive historiography. Its aim was not to legitimate the existence of the Dutch Humanist Association mainly by including great philosophers (the classical "history of ideas") as an even greater tradition in the history of the organization. It was rather more a self-conscious view on the existence and importance of Dutch organized humanism after World War II.

The contribution by Peter Derkx in this volume (see chapter 3) is a history written with a similar approach. Derkx is concerned with the origins of Dutch humanism and with its forerunners. He attempts to understand how humanism was described and defined in the past and explains how the word "humanism" is used today. He does not seek to legitimate the existence of the movement but offers ways of understanding what we talk about when we refer to a movement or a way of thinking as "humanism in the Netherlands".

Historiography Today: the State of the Art

Het Humanistisch Archief (Humanist Archive) was founded five years after the publication of *Geschiedenis van het humanisme.* The aim of this archive is to collect, conserve, and make accessible documents and documentation regarding the humanist movement in the Netherlands from 1850. The Humanist Archive considers it an important task to collect material that could play a significant role in the debate on the identity of the present-day humanist movement and could contribute to the creation of a balanced understanding of the historical, social, and cultural development of the Netherlands. The archive contains written and audiovisual material on individual humanists and humanist organizations. This is supplemented by interviews (recorded on audiotape) with important members of the humanist movement in the Netherlands.

When we look at these aims and ideals of the Humanist Archive, we think it is correct to speak of a new approach in humanist historiography. The main characteristics of this approach are the preservation of the source material on Dutch humanist movements, and an emphasis on the history of Dutch humanism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, set in a broader context of Dutch social, political, and cultural history. However, it does not mean to put an end to the searching for forerunners and tradition. One might better speak of a shift to more recent history and a search for forerunners and tradition that are closer to present-day Dutch organized humanism in terms of chronology and of membership of the Dutch humanist movement. Related examples are the studies dedicated to the ideas, life, and works of Jaap van Praag, Anton Constandse and Garmt Stuiveling (Derkx & Gasenbeek 1997; Gasenbeek, De Jong & Edelman 1999; Gasenbeek 2000).

In addition to this shift, there is a broadening of interest in more specific aspects and developments of the Dutch humanist organizations. The study *Voor menselijkheid of tegen godsdienst. Humanisme in Nederland 1850-1960* (For humanity or against religion. Humanism in the Netherlands 1850-1960; Derkx, Janz, Molenberg & Van Baalen 1998), published in 1998, can be considered to be the initiator of this shift. This study, whose editors are all assistant professors at the University for Humanistics, is more than a classical history of ideas. The authors of the book start from an important question that arose from the historiography of Dutch humanism: if Dutch humanism was more than anti-theism, where did Dutch humanists" sympathies lie? Another important question they embrace is: what is the relationship between Dutch humanism and politics, and more specifically socialism? These questions are, according to the authors, an interesting point of departure for reflecting on the meaning of the word "humanism". Is it not better, from now on, to speak of different humanisms, not only as a way of distinguishing Renaissance humanism from nineteenth-century humanism, but also to do justice to the variety of humanisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? It probably is. *Voor menselijkheid of tegen godsdienst* provides a strong impulse to this new approach to the history and historiography of Dutch organized humanism.

Conclusion: Identity and Self-Image

The self-image and identity of Dutch organized humanism has changed over the years. These changes took place through, and reside in, historiography.

In the epic approach, the humanist self-image and identity were formed by an emphasis on important men of the first hours of the Dutch Humanist Association. In a way, this phase was defensive, because at the time the history of Dutch humanism was written to influence and guide future historians. The self-image was one of wise and strong pioneers.

In the second approach to historiography, humanists attempted to emphasize and legitimize their existence by referring to a great and elite intellectual tradition. The humanist identity was centered around this tradition and built mainly on a classic history of ideas.

In the most recent approach, a more open historiography is stimulated by the Humanist Archive and the University for Humanistics, and by the contacts of humanist thinkers with the elites of other (former) pillars of Dutch society in, for example, the meeting of the *Nederlands Gesprekscentrum* (Dutch Center for Dialogue), without however turning away completely from the second approach. The self-image is centered on the idea that humanist organizations have a practical orientation and are not only involved in preserving and developing philosophical ideas. The humanist identity in historiography is becoming increasingly based on the notion that this identity is changing over the years and is therefore sometimes vague. The humanist historiography, however, is steadily becoming self-conscious enough to embrace this dynamic identity.

In our view, all this should eventually lead to a historiography of Dutch humanism and Dutch organized humanism that focuses on the reaction of humanist organizations to the issues of their time. Questions and issues that were considered relevant by, for example, the Dutch Humanist Association, were part of a broader public and political debate. One can think of humanist views on peace, decolonization, emancipation, feminism, dialogue, modernization and secularization, environmental problems, youth culture, multiculturalism, science, poverty and world politics. What views did the humanists have on these subjects? Did they try to join hands with the reforming organizations and emancipation movements of the 1960's and 1970's? Such a historiography of Dutch humanism will have to be part of broader contemporary historiography and must build on studies that shed light on the context of social, economic, cultural, and political history in which the humanist movement of the Netherlands existed and worked. This will lead to a broader non-humanist and humanist historiography of humanism.

6 Humanist Counseling in the Netherlands

Douwe van Houten and Jan Hein Mooren

Since World War II, a special kind of counseling has developed in the Netherlands, humanist counseling. The word "humanist" does not refer here to the well known "human potential movement" in psychology[1], but to humanism, a specific life stance within the professional category of "spiritual guidance" or "moral counseling" (Mooren 1998). Humanist counselors work alongside Catholic and Protestant pastoral counselors in the armed forces, prisons, hospitals, homes for the elderly, etc. This professional category has recently been joined by Hindu pundits and Islamic imams. The practice of humanist counseling is based on and inspired by humanist principles and values.

The task of humanist counselors is to contribute to the empowering of humanity. In other words, to foster human dignity and the quality of life of the people in the institutions concerned. This task takes shape on two levels. On the individual level it involves counseling clients who, as a consequence of illness, confinement, or confrontations with acts of war and the like, experience serious problems and ask questions about themselves and their lives. Humanist counselors focus on the existential dimension of these questions and problems, on the sense of meaning in life, and on the values that underlie their clients' experiences, choices and actions. For many people in the Netherlands, the traditional religions are no longer the sources they turn to in search of answers to these questions. For them, the humanist philosophy of life might be an alternative, because of its emphasis on human solidarity and individual responsibility, its secular orientation to understanding the world and existence, and its acknowledgment of the human ability to give meaning to life.

On an institutional level, the task of humanist counselors regarding the empowering of humanity means that they contribute to the development of a self-reflexive organizational culture, which is characterized by respect for the emotional and moral integrity of employees, by the stimulation of their responsibilities for the common good and for mutual co-operation, and by a profound sensitivity for the moral questions that go with the tasks and goals of the institution they work for. Humanist counselors are expected to advise on matters that touch the humaneness of the organization and to intervene when human dignity is threatened.

In this chapter, we will give a picture of humanist counseling, its content and methods. We will go on to discuss issues of professionalization in counseling: what forms it is taking now and should be taking in the future. To shed light on

these issues, we will explain the concept of "normative professionalism", which was developed by the University for Humanistics. But we will start with an outline of the social and cultural situation that made the rise of humanist counseling possible, followed by a historical synopsis of its development. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the prospects and dilemmas involved.

Religion and Secularization in the Netherlands

The religious landscape of the Netherlands presents a complicated picture. It is safe to say that the Dutch have a tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism. Religious freedom has been the rule since Napoleon occupied the Netherlands in the early 19th century. The Dutch Reformed Church had been the established church throughout the two centuries preceding the French Revolution, but even then, other religious traditions were tolerated. Moreover, the Netherlands has had a humanist tradition from Erasmus up to the present time—possibly a consequence of the contact with other cultures through international trade.

The present situation is characterized by a high level of secularization: many people no longer adhere to a religious belief, and even when they do, they often no longer belong to a church or attend church services. To understand this development, we must go back to the 19th century. Although in 1815 the Netherlands had become a kingdom, with William I as its absolute monarch, liberalism and civil rights were crucial influences on the formulation of a constitution in 1848. And although the social elite consisted mainly of members of the Dutch Reformed Church and of liberals, the Calvinists and Roman Catholics—who were regarded as second-class citizens at the start of the 19th century—began to organize themselves in political parties and labor unions. In 1853, the Catholic Church reclaimed its position in the social hierarchy, and the principle of disestablishment of church and state came into operation.

Calvinism and Catholicism can therefore be seen as social movements based on religion. Their striving for emancipation was founded on the principle of equal rights. These emancipation processes resulted in a typically Dutch solution: the denominational segregation of society, also called "the segmented society" (Lijphart 1968), in which society was divided into different religious communities (pillars[2]), each with their own institutional arrangements, such as political parties, labor unions, newspapers, hospitals, schools, broadcasting companies, social work, and housing associations. The social life of citizens was often confined to their own community (denomination). By the end of the 19th century, two large denomination-based communities had developed: Catholic and Reformed/Calvinist. However, a third "pillar" could be identified, consisting of non-religious groups such as liberals, socialists and humanists, which has been referred to as a neutral community, using public schools, municipal hospitals, independent newspapers and broadcasting companies and the like. As a consequence, many towns would have three primary and three secondary schools, three hospitals, three organizations for social work, and so on.

This societal configuration would have been impossible without two principles that operate in unison. The first is the principle of pacification and non-inter-

vention. The religious communities were sovereign: they coexisted, but they did not interfere in each other's domains of influence. Only the leaders of these communities had contact with each other; they negotiated matters relating to the common good and questions of the fair distribution of financial resources (Daalder 1955). Outside these contacts, members of the various communities did not interact—not even in business—and, of course, mixed marriages were not allowed. Non-intervention applied to the government as well: the state was not allowed to intervene in the communities and their institutions, except when these were unable to solve problems of the common good or in the public domain. This is known as the "subsidiary principle" among Catholics and as the "sovereignty principle" among Calvinists. Both notions have been developed in religious political theories.

The second principle has already been mentioned: the principle of equal rights. According to this principle, the various communities have the same rights and provisions. At the start of the 20th century, for example, freedom of education became a major issue in the Netherlands, resulting in what became known as the "school-struggle". As a result of this struggle, the constitution was changed in 1917 to guarantee state funding of Catholic and Protestant schools on equal terms with public schools. Although religion nowadays plays a minor role in the Netherlands, the principle of equal rights continues to be important. It has, for instance, been crucial for the development of humanist counseling and for the foundation of the University for Humanistics.

This system of denominational segregation of Dutch society disintegrated rapidly in the late 1960s. This was the outcome of a process of secularization and individualization, which in its turn was a consequence of the social changes known as the democratization movement of the 1960s. The traditional communities eroded, as did their institutional arrangements. The churches lost their influence, their values were no longer widely accepted, their rituals became obsolete and religious leaders were no longer in a position of authority. The "pillars" were dislodged by a remarkable and far-reaching process of individualization.

These developments form a background for understanding the rise of humanism in the Netherlands. The Dutch Humanist Association was founded in 1946. Its primary aim was to organize non-religious people to counter the tendency towards nihilism that, according to J. van Praag, threatened Dutch society after World War II.[3] The second aim was to claim equal rights for non-religious people. On a concrete level, equal rights meant, among other things, that humanist counseling was available alongside pastoral counseling in institutions such as the army, prisons, hospitals and homes for the elderly to non-religious people who needed moral counseling.

The historical developments described here have placed humanism in the Netherlands in a strange situation. Although the rise of humanism was not the result of any significant self-organization as one of the "pillars", it was made possible only by the principle of equal rights that served to ensure coexistence of the denominations in the "pillar system". On the other hand, the Dutch Humanist Association owes its existence to the process of secularization that undermined the system of denominational segregation. Despite the ongoing secularization tendency, however, and although many non-religious people do endorse the hu-

manist principles of autonomy, responsibility and solidarity, membership of the Dutch Humanist Association is very low. Which may be explained by the fact that secularization and individualization go hand in hand. Nevertheless, the introduction of humanist counseling in the aforementioned institutions, and the foundation of the University for Humanistics, were the result of these opposing developments.

In the Netherlands, the level of secularization is very high, and a high percentage of people have no church affiliation. Secularization means that the influence of churches and religion on social life and social institutions is diminishing. This has to do with the rapid social changes that took place in the late 1960s, known as the "democratization movement". The traditional confessional communities eroded, as did their institutional arrangements. Their values were no longer respected and a remarkable process of individualization took place. Collective religion lost its role, traditional rituals became outdated and the authority of religious leaders evaporated. This was an era of turbulence.

Nevertheless, the combination of secularization and deconfessionalization on the one hand and the appeal to the equality principle on the other hand is a little odd. The equality principle is closely connected with denominational segregation, which means the segmentation of Dutch society in different religious communities, as well as a non-religious one. From the mid-1960s on, the influence of the pillar system declined rapidly. Secularization meant that organized religion became less important. One might have expected that the equality principle as well would become less important, but this was not so.

In September 1989, on the occasion of the first opening of the academic year of the University for Humanistics, the Christian Democrat Minister of Education, W. Deetman, referred explicitly to the equality principle to explain why a humanist university is important and must be financed by the state. This means that this university can be seen partly as a by-product of the pillar system, albeit a rather late one. Because the Catholics and the Reformed/Calvinists have their own universities, the Humanists are entitled to claim a university as well.

This is even more remarkable when we compare it with what happened in other professions at the end of the 1960s, social work for example. In that period, in social work, religion and the role of the churches became less important. This was taken as a sign of ongoing professionalization, in which scientific insights became more important than religious values. Pastoral and humanist counselors did not follow this development, which resulted in the creation of a distinct type of professionalism alongside the dominant technical-instrumental professionalism. We will elaborate on this later.

In a more general sense, it is important to bear in mind that only 37% of the Dutch population is a member of a church and that 60% of these members can be considered marginal, attending a church only incidentally (figures from 1999, Becker & De Wit 2000). Of the people born after 1960, no more than 27% is a member of a church. This does not necessarily imply that the Dutch are non-religious. Research of the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) indicates that religious feelings are not strictly related to church membership. In the Netherlands 27% of the population consider themselves to be non-religious, and 19% as neither religious nor non-religious. Taken together that makes 46%. On

the other hand, 52% of the population believe in God, 60% believe in life after death, 55% believe in heaven, but only 26% believe in hell. However, 76% of the population hold that the experience of meaning of life is a matter of human potential and only 19% hold that this is a matter of God or belief.

Referring to church membership, the percentage is forecast to decrease to 33% by 2010. At that time, 6% of the population will be Islamic and Islam will be the second religion in the Netherlands, after the Roman Catholic Church (13%). Even though church membership refers to organized religion only, the research outcomes suggest an element of individualization of religion. For the Netherlands and its segmented ("pillarized") society, this is an impressive change over a relatively short period of thirty-five years: in 1965, church membership was still at 65%. Compared with other European countries, the percentage of non-denominational people in the Netherlands may well be very high, but if the number of non-religious people is counted, the differences are much smaller.

A Brief History of Humanist Counseling

The founders of the Dutch Humanist Association were not content with the Association being just a center for contemplation to counter the dangers of nihilism after World War II. They wanted to offer the members practical support in giving direction and meaning to life. This was achieved through a variety of social services and through humanist counseling (Karel, Van der Kroef & Huiskes 1989). Humanist counseling focuses on clients with existential or spiritual problems and questions.

The central idea (i.e., the reason for guiding individuals who are confronted by existential problems) of humanist counseling was formulated immediately after World War II (Van Praag 1947). But humanist counseling actually started in 1949, when volunteers (with the approval of the government) started working in labor camps for the unemployed. The next step was the admission of humanist counseling in the army (1950), followed by counseling for prison inmates (1955). In 1968, professionals who were paid by the government replaced the volunteers (Flokstra & Wieling 1986; Van Baalen 1997).

It is less clear when exactly humanists started counseling in hospitals, but this too began with volunteers who visited patients in the early 1950s. From 1955 on, the elderly in nursing homes were also visited. Until 1969 there was no central coordination of these visiting activities; they came from local initiatives of members of the Dutch Humanist Association. In the homes for the elderly, professional humanist counseling started in 1971, in hospitals it started in 1974 (Flokstra & Wieling 1986). Currently, the main body of professional humanist counselors is working in health care institutions and homes for the elderly.

Humanist counseling thus developed from the activities of volunteers, who received no specialized training, into the professional form of counseling that now exists. This process of professionalization passed through several phases. Let us look, for instance, at the training programs. In 1962, training of the counselors was restricted to incidental (philosophically oriented) courses in humanism. But from 1964, humanist counselors were educated at the Humanist Training Insti-

tute. This institute initially offered a two-year part-time course. Its curriculum consisted mainly of courses in ethics, the humanist philosophy of life, and religion. From 1967, the curriculum became a three-year program. The philosophical and theoretical orientation changed (as a consequence of social developments) into a more practical one, and social sciences such as sociology and psychology were introduced. In 1977, the Humanist Training Institute was officially acknowledged and financed by the Dutch government. In 1980, a four-year program was started. In 1989, the University for Humanistics was founded, and the Humanist Training Institute ceased to exist. The (also state-financed) university, which offers a six-year course, represents the realization of one of J. van Praag's original goals: the training of humanist counselors at a scientific level. Of course, the university has a broader goal than just training counselors, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

The picture described so far might give the impression of continuous progress, but, as is often the case, the reality is less rosy. Humanist counseling appears to be a vulnerable profession. On the one hand the professions that go under the names of "spiritual guidance" or "moral counseling" have gained less recognition than psychotherapy and social work. Undoubtedly this is a consequence of the secularization process. Then, within the category of spiritual guidance humanist counselors are a minority compared to pastoral counselors. This is true in most of the institutions where humanist counseling is offered to clients. Humanist counseling, therefore, often finds itself in a situation in which it has to compete with other professions on the one hand, and with pastoral counseling on the other. Because this interacts with continuous reorganizations in, for instance, health care institutions, and with economy measures on the part of the government, humanist counseling has more than once come under attack. It is all the more vulnerable because the group of humanist counselors is small compared to professional social workers and psychotherapists.

Despite these conditions, there is widespread recognition of the constitutional right to freedom of religion, which is realized on the institutional level by the principle of plurality in spiritual counseling. This principle holds that a client, soldier, or inmate should have the opportunity to choose the kind of spiritual counseling that matches his or her own life stance. In the institutions falling under the jurisdiction of the government (the army, prisons) this has been the rule since the 1950s. The National Federation of Health Care Institutions also adopted this principle in 1974 and formalized it in 1986 in its policy on spiritual guidance in hospitals (NZR 1974; NZR 1986).

A recent development deserves mention at the end of this short history of humanist counseling. The founding of the University for Humanistics marked the start of attempts to extend humanist counseling into new areas. Private practices are emerging, as are professional activities in companies and other institutions outside the domains of health care, prisons and the army. Whether these initiatives must be regarded as an extension of humanist counseling or as a sign of differentiation (i.e., creating new functions or even a new profession) within the process of professionalization remains to be seen. We will return to these developments in the final section of this chapter.

The Content of Humanist Counseling

In the course of life, everyone has to find his or her perspective on what are referred to as "existential concerns": the meaning of life; secular and transcendental reality; the relationship between freedom and destiny; the meaning of autonomy and responsibility; attitudes towards suffering, unhappiness and death; and so on. The answers are always individual answers, because they are highly personal. But they are derived from common, cultural sources: religions, philosophies of life, and ideologies.

In everyday life, these cultural sources themselves are not the focus of much thought: they seem self-evident and are used without conscious consideration in the process of interpreting things and events. In other words, our actions, intentions and evaluations are guided by the beliefs and values that we have come to accept and have internalized. But every now and then we feel the need to consciously reflect on events and actions, to strengthen our sense of meaning in life. This certainly is the case when we are confronted with drastic changes in our lives, or with events that have a profound emotional impact. This impact can be so strong that our habitual way of looking at life is no longer self-evident and has to be revised. The sudden death of a loved one, being told that you are seriously ill, or losing a job can have this effect, as well as extraordinary situations such as disasters, acts of war, and car accidents. More ordinary conditions also can result in the loss of one's sense of meaning: difficult decisions, moral dilemmas, the need to abandon an important goal, aging.

All these conditions call for a process of readjustment and reorientation. As we stated in our introduction, humanist counseling focuses on the existential dimension of these problems. The frame of reference in understanding the problems is the client's life stance and the attitude of the humanist counselor towards his client, the content of the interventions is inspired by his humanist philosophy of life.[4] This perspective has important implications for the way the discussions with the client are conducted, as we will see shortly.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the content of humanist counseling, we will take a closer look at the concept "meaning of life". Every person, whether religious or of a secular orientation, must come to terms with this. It is customary to say that people "give" meaning to life: people are seen as creatures who actively respond to ups and downs in life, in order to experience a sense of meaning.[5] But what is involved in this act of giving meaning to life? The expression can be seen as referring to several distinct but related tasks that have to be fulfilled in order to experience a sense of meaning. In other words: giving meaning to life refers to intertwined processes within the individual that result in a positive attitude towards the world and a positive feeling about existence.

In order to impart a sense of purpose in life, the individual must commit itself to objects, people, ideals, etc. This is one aspect of "meaning of life". Another part of the feeling that life makes sense is that someone acts according to the values that constitute his or her moral and ethical system: peace of mind in the moral sense, a clear conscience. Yet another aspect is that people, to a certain extent, need to comprehend what life is all about, why things happen or why not. Ratio-

nal explanations are not the only cognitive elements that create understanding, because explanations of that kind do not answer the question "why" things happen as they do. A world view also contains answers to this last question, and so contributes to one's feeling of comprehension. In its aspect of interpretative control this feeling resembles a fourth element, the feeling that one is competent in handling situations and events, that one can achieve goals, that one has a certain amount of behavioral control over one's life. We want to have at least the feeling that we are able to react in a sensible and satisfying way to events that themselves might be beyond our control or influence. This fourth element, in turn, is closely related to a positive feeling about oneself, to self-esteem, which is the fifth and final element of the sense of meaning (Mooren 1998).

In our outline of the development of humanist counseling, we pointed out that counselors work in hospitals, homes for the elderly, prisons, and the army. It follows that there is much diversity in the questions clients are confronted with. Some questions are of a general nature, in the sense that anyone can ask them in any context. Questions about one's relationships, one's future, one's values and ideals may pop up spontaneously, though they are often triggered by the situation at hand. Indeed, such questions are present in other institutions as well, such as the police, schools, industry, business, and volunteer associations. In some of these institutions, pastoral counseling is present, but humanist counseling has not extended its activities to this area.

These "general" existential questions are important in everyday life outside institutions. But there are other, more specific questions that have a close relation to the institution: to the reason why one is staying there, or to the constraints and risks that are involved in the—temporary or permanent—stay. In hospitals, for instance, counselors may help clients in the process of reaching a decision on treatment or non-treatment. In homes for the elderly they meet people who are evaluating their lives or who are experiencing a deep sense of loss. In prisons they discuss not only the moral aspects of a crime or of the detention discussed, but also the sometimes tragic life stories of the inmates, as well as the deep frustrations caused by the confinement itself. In the army, finally, humanist counselors may accompany the troops on peace missions, in order to support these men and women in digesting their experiences and moral dilemmas.

These are, of course, only some of the many and varied problems that are presented to the counselors. All these problems have an existential dimension, which is the common denominator in the profession of humanist counseling. It is acknowledged nowadays, however, that work in these different institutions demands different capabilities and expertise. Moreover, outside the institutions there is an increasing need for humanist counseling on an ambulatory basis, for example after a stay in a hospital, after having become a victim of an accident or of violence, after a divorce, or being dismissed or retiring from work. A few humanist counselors have established themselves in "free practices", but humanist counseling has mainly been confined to, or locked-up in, the aforementioned institutions.

The Methods of Humanist Counseling

Humanist counselors work with clients on a one to one basis as well as in groups. They strive to strengthen in them the sense of meaning, by supporting and encouraging them to explore their emotions, thoughts and actions. They stimulate them to put into words their goals, their desires, their views on life and existence and their moral and emotional dilemmas in living life in the most rewarding way. They also offer comfort and advice when needed.

From the outset, the approach of humanist counselors was guided by principles of dialogue and client-centeredness. For Elders (2000b), dialogue is so essential to humanism that he considers them to be Siamese twins. It is no surprise, therefore, that in humanist counseling, communication has the character of a dialogue: a conversation in which none of the participants has an authoritative position. The concept of "normative professionalism"(see the next section; see also Van Houten & Kunneman 1993) implies this characteristic.

Nonetheless, the relationship in humanist counseling is not entirely mutual. The relationship is about the client, and the task of the counselor is to sustain him in his search for meaning and human dignity. In the 1970s and 1980s, the main approach of humanist counselors was the Rogerian "client-centered" method, which focuses on the perceptions the client has of himself and of the world he lives in (Rogers & Stevens 1967). However, at the Humanist Training Institute it was not the techniques of the counselor but his or her attitude that received the most attention. Having the right attitude was considered to be the main condition for the counselor to be able to counsel clients in a way that guaranteed their autonomy and humaneness (Hoogeveen 1985). Thus, in learning his profession, the counselor directed his attention mainly to his own person, in search of an attitude of empathy, in search of congruence and genuineness. The client-centered attitude is still one of the main qualities of humanist counselors in their approach to clients, but from the 1980s and during the 1990s other approaches slowly came into view.

On the one hand the Rogerian (psychology-based) approach was supplemented by theories on professionalization and by arguments from social philosophy, leading to the already mentioned concept of a "normative profession". In a way, this can be seen as a strengthening of the emphasis on autonomy, as we will see in the next section. But these supplements gave humanist counseling a more solid "raison d'être".

On the other hand it was realized that autonomy, although it remains an important principle, is not the only subject that requires reflection. Clients need to reflect on their lives in terms of, for instance, goals and moral predications, and in terms of the world view they adhere to. In other words, the client-centered approach, with its emphasis on self and autonomy, is now considered a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for professional expertise. Thus, a narrative approach to counseling has recently been developed in which the various aspects of the act of giving meaning to life (see the previous section) receive attention in a more or less systematic way (Mooren 1999). This method closely resembles the existential-biographical method, which creates the possibility of reflecting on a wide variety of questions concerning the way life is, can be, and should be, lived

(Brouwer 1994). An important consequence of these developments is that humanist counseling, although still borrowing insights from psychology, is less psychologically oriented than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, and focuses more on life stance and existential questions.

Yet another development is an emphasis on spirituality (Jorna 1998). This is a response to the fact that humanist counselors repeatedly encounter clients who are not satisfied with a humanism that is dominated by rationalism and that turns away from experiences which transcend ordinary reality. Nevertheless, they rightfully consider themselves humanists, because they do adhere to the principle of individual human responsibility, and because they do fall back on human capabilities and on a secular orientation in giving meaning to life and existence.

Regarding its position in the aforementioned institutions, humanist counseling has some features in common with pastoral counseling. It is worth mentioning this, because these features are important for the way humanist counselors approach their clients. The most important of these are what is known as the "sanctuary function". Hospitals can serve as an example to illustrate this function. Humanist counselors work in these institutions, but they are not part the staff in the sense that they contribute to the treatment of patients. Also, they do not exchange information about their counseling sessions with doctors or nurses: the conversations are strictly confidential. In consequence, there is no treatment indication for humanist counseling, which is consistent with the idea of a normative profession (see below). Indeed, humanist counselors offer their support, or patients ask for them on their own initiative, but the counseling is always entirely on the basis of free choice. This starting point was not inspired by the principle of autonomy in humanism (although there certainly is no conflict here), but is rather, on the institutional level, the consequence of the right of freedom of religion, which is guaranteed by the Dutch constitution. The sanctuary function operates not only in hospitals and other health care institutions, but in prisons and in the army as well.

Related to the sanctuary function is the fact that humanist (and pastoral) counselors, though often appointed by the institution they work for, must be confirmed in this appointment by the Dutch Humanist Association (or in the case of pastoral counselors: by their religious denomination), to which they are accountable. This arrangement ensures the relative independence of humanist counselors (and pastoral counselors) from the institutions they work for, and therefore the freedom for clients to choose the form of moral counseling that fits their life stance.

Humanist Counseling: a "Normative Profession"

Professionalization refers to the process whereby an occupation becomes a profession (Siegrist 1990). Humanist counseling is involved in such a process. However, what kind of professionalization is fitting for an occupation such as humanist counseling? This question has received a great deal of attention since the founding of the University for Humanistics. The concepts of "normative profes-

sion" and "normative professionalism" have been developed to indicate the precise nature of humanist counseling, which has always been felt to differ in some respects from classical professions like medicine, social work and psychotherapy.[6] On the other hand, these concepts represent a critique on and a supplement to the already existing forms of professionalization.[7] The particular characteristics of humanist counseling can be elucidated by explaining the concepts of "normative profession" and "normative professionalism".

Before elaborating on this, it is important to mention that three approaches to professionalization have been developed in sociology. Professionalization has been accepted as a prerequisite for a complex, modern society (Parsons 1951). In such a society, problems are so complex that you need professional skills in order to solve them (the functionalist approach). Professionalization has also been understood as a strategy for gaining power over clients by the construction of "dependency cultures" (the strategic or power approach). Professionalization in this sense implies an asymmetrical relationship between the professional and the client. Illich wrote about "disabling professions" and recommended self-help and deprofessionalization (Illich 1977). Lastly, in the trait approach, professionalization is analyzed in terms of the main characteristics of professions, such as their scientific foundation, scientific training, ascribed social authority, a professional association with an ethical code, and the like (Freidson 1970).

For humanist counseling, the functional argument is inappropriate. Existential problems may be more complicated than fifty years ago, but not in a technical way. A humanist counselor is not an existential expert in the traditional sense, someone who knows best how to handle meanings of life. Therefore, counseling can not be understood as treatment, with the counselor as expert and the client as passive subject.

This implies that to look upon counseling as an exercise of power is equally inappropriate. As a matter of principle, humanist counseling is based on a symmetrical relationship. Instead of "treatment" the term "advice" better describes a relationship in which the counselor assists clients to find their own solutions to their existential problems.

Regarding the trait approach, the professionalization of humanist counseling goes along these lines in some respects, such as a academic training, a professional association and an ethical code. But we also find differences with other professions. In the trait approach, the first characteristic of a profession is that help and treatment are based on scientific knowledge. Indeed, the "classical" professions, such as medicine, have a tendency to use theoretical models or diagnostic systems (i.e., scientific knowledge) in interpreting the problems of their clients. In doing so, these problems are reduced to problems that a professional can treat or solve. The professional is the one who tells the client what to do ("the doctor knows best"). Success, if possible at all, depends on the client following the instructions of the professional, thus accepting and assimilating the interpretations and language of the professional. As a model, in applied science, the interventions are rather instrumental, based on mainly positivistic research outcomes.

Handling existential problems, however, is not a matter of applied science. Finding out what makes life worthwhile is not a matter of positivistic scientific re-

search, but of personal experience and worldly wisdom. It is about personal biographies, life plans, self-identity and personal values and preferences (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). Humanist counseling, therefore, consists of a dialogue in which the client searches for meanings, reformulating his problems in colloquy with the counselor. It is not the interpretations of the counselor, but the experience, meanings and valuing process of the client that are the center of attention. While they are the starting point of the counseling relationship, they are also its goal. This requires not a combination of pure and applied science according to the formula of positivism, but a more practical science in which narratives play an important role.

This does not imply that professionalization isn't possible or desirable. We have to look for a special kind of profession: for a normative profession. Humanist counseling is about world views and values. And the counselor does not enter the scene in the role of an expert who applies "objective" knowledge. So, in humanist counseling, the normative dimension is essential. This is true in two ways. Firstly, the content of the counseling is about norms and values, and in this regard counseling can never be a matter of expertise. It is about the choices in and perspectives on life of the client himself. Secondly, in the process of counseling, the counselor himself is present with his own norms and values, hopes and fears, way of looking at life and existence. The principle of symmetry demands that the counselor acknowledge this. This, in turn, demands a high degree of self-reflexivity from the counselor. Normative professionalism does not deny this normative dimension. Instead, it demands that the counselor be transparent in this regard for the client. His own doubts and lack of answers, as well as his own way of looking at life, are used to reach a profound understanding of the client. The decisive quality in humanist counseling is the capacity of the counselor to be present as a person of flesh and blood, without losing his client-centeredness for a single moment. The development of normative professionalism is therefore a supplement to already existing forms and traditions in professionalization.

Normative professionalism is not exclusive to humanist counseling. This perspective has been discussed with pastoral counselors, social workers, community developers and other professionals: they recognized most of the characteristics of normative professionalism in their daily work. A theory of normative professionalism currently is still in progress, but the building stones are available. In part, they are related to the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984), Anthony Giddens's ideas on self-identity in late modernity (Giddens 1991) and Beck's notion of reflexive modernization in a risk society (Beck 1992).

The other traits mentioned by Freidson (1970) can be summed up concisely. The second characteristic of a profession is that it is based on university vocational training programs, such as the degree from the University for Humanistics. Thirdly, the professionals are organized in a professional association with an ethical code. For humanist counselors, a start has been made on setting up such an association, and an ethical code is available. A fourth characteristic has to do with social authority and acknowledgment. This does not exist for humanist counseling, except for some political acknowledgment. The fifth trait deals with the legal protection of the profession, which is not the case for hu-

manist counseling. The final characteristic of a profession relates to the "esprit de corps" of the professionals, with a common language and a culture characteristic of that profession. For humanist counselors, the score here is low.

To summarize, the professionalization process of humanist counseling is still at an initial stage. This is not surprising; the four-year course of the Humanist Training Institute only started in 1980, and the first students of the University for Humanistics graduated in 1995. A professionalization process takes a long time. Nevertheless, humanist counseling has been designed as a normative profession, and students are trained along these lines. Their professionalism is characterized by communicative skills focused on a symmetrical relationship between client and counselor. Counseling is personal and contextual, based upon involvement and authenticity. Attentiveness and responsibility are crucial moral dimensions, and the accent is on meaning of life, and less on rapid results. Moreover, humanist counseling is a learning profession, in which high levels of reflexivity are the professional norm.

Prospects and Dilemmas

What does the future hold for humanist counseling? This is a complicated issue with many dilemmas and uncertainties, in the short run as well as in the long run. In the army, prisons, hospitals and homes for the elderly, there are about 1250 counselors, of which about 175 are humanist counselors. It is improbable that these numbers will increase. In the Netherlands, the government, healthcare institutions and institutions for the care of the elderly are fascinated by an economic management style that concentrates on efficiency and effectiveness. Seen from this perspective, moral counseling is a rather "soft" profession, offering no clear instrumental outcomes. Managers do think in terms of products and results. Attentiveness is a low-priority value, sometimes even considered to be redundant. Therefore, the main challenge is to maintain the number of professional counselors.

Referring to humanist counseling in particular, we are confronted with the fact that this profession has developed as an alternative to pastoral counseling for non-denominational people. This secular counseling fits a secularized society, but is still identified with traditional religious counseling. This double identity sometimes has negative effects, in the sense that denomination-based counseling is seen by many as outdated. They prefer the idea that professional help and assistance must be delivered by therapists or social workers, who are result-oriented.

This is connected to a major dilemma for humanist counseling. As we have stated, the development of humanist counseling in the 1950s and 1960s was in part a by-product of the pillar system in the Netherlands, and of the equality principle on which this system was based. Therefore, humanist counseling developed as an alternative for pastoral counseling, not as a job in its own right. For some pastoral counselors and politicians, counseling without God or belief is not really counseling, but something artificial. Moreover, the reason why humanist counseling exists is that pastoral counseling already existed.

Most institutions have *one* counseling service, composed of Catholic, protestant and humanist counselors, in some cases supplemented by pundits and imams. To some degree there are similarities between pastoral and humanist counseling, partly as a consequence of the secularization of pastoral counseling. Religion certainly does not play a role in all contacts with clients. However, pastoral counselors fulfill two roles: that of traditional religious counselor and that of a (post)modern secular counselor. According to the client and the context, they decide which role is appropriate.

At this point the conclusion could be that humanist counselors better develop a strategy to become an independent profession with a clear professional and humanist profile. However, this confronts them with the problem that they would sever the link with the reason for their existence, and managers will cease to appoint them. Therefore it is not an option in the short term. As a consequence, humanist counselors have to cooperate with pastoral counselors. This can result in an profile which is both traditional confessional and modern secular. Sometimes, this unclear profile interferes with the identity of the humanist counselor as a contemporary, secular professional, and leaves him with a kind of pseudo-profile. In the long term, such a pseudo-profile is not convincing. The humanist counselor faces the dilemma between short-term necessity to co-operate with pastoral counselors and long-term perspective of becoming an independent profession as a promising challenge.

As stated above, humanist counseling will be a normative profession and not a purely technical-instrumental profession in which values and world views have been ruled out. However, many managers confront professional workers with a technical and calculating approach, in which good value for money is the key principle. The question is, can humanist counseling be cost-effective and what might that mean? Does its effectiveness have to do with spiritual well-being, and how should that be measured? Can humanist counseling live up to the idea that x minutes of humanist counseling generates y per cent increase in existential wellbeing? We are confronted with different narratives that do not fit.

The central idea of humanist counseling is that existential attentiveness is an intrinsic value, irrespective of instrumental effects. Nowadays such a story does not convince managers who are inviting or even demanding humanist counselors to prove the value of their job in economic terms. But, whatever, humanist counseling can not be understood as a commodity. It is not a product but a relationship, and that means that the quality of the relationship is decisive; not its instrumental results. This message does not sell well in a no-nonsense era, where no-nonsense is on the edge of no-sense. However, making sense is precisely the core of humanist counseling. The future of humanist counseling is fairly uncertain, not because of its intrinsic value but because of a utilitarian approach to care and support in present-day institutions.

However, people in modern society are confronted with many existential uncertainties and with an impressive diversity and plurality. To give meaning to life is no longer a matter of given frames, but is a lifelong project people are actively involved in. Seen from this perspective, it is reasonable to expect that there is a challenging future for humanist counseling. However, funding is a problem. In the Dutch welfare state, most financial resources regarding support and assis-

tance are related to (health) care, and humanist counseling does not belong to that area. Existential advice and empowering humanity relate to an entirely different matter, which implies that another type of funding must be developed, outside healthcare provisions. And that will be no easy job.

Finally, four master courses are in development at the University for Humanistics, in accordance with the introduction, in the Netherlands, of a new structure in higher education consisting of a three-year bachelor and a two-year master course, in accordance with the Convention of Bologna. In addition to "humanist counseling", which was the main profile of the present six-year course, three new masters degrees will be introduced in 2004: "education", "advice, organization and policy making" and "research". To date, several moral counselors have already become involved in education (especially ethics) and in giving advice to organizations. This could result in a mixed profile for humanist counselors, but education, advice and research can also become expert profiles on their own. Currently, both options are open. Future decision-making will influence the development of humanist counseling.