

WHAT IS HUMANISM?

HUMANISM IS A NON-RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OR APPROACH TO LIFE SHARED BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE UK AND AROUND THE WORLD.

Humanists believe it is possible to lead a good, happy, and meaningful life without the need for religion.

The **Happy Human** is a symbol used by humanist organisations all over the world. It represents a celebration of being human – celebrating our potential for happiness and celebrating what human beings are capable of.



“For as long as there have been human beings, there have been non-religious people whose view of the world can be described as ‘humanist’: informed by **evidence**, inspired by **empathy**, and infused with **hope** and **wonder** for the world around us.”

ANDREW COPSON,
Chief Executive,
Humanists UK



FIVE COMMON FEATURES OF A HUMANIST APPROACH TO LIFE



1 Humanists believe that human beings have natural origins. We **evolved** naturally like all other living things. We have evolved many capacities and, if we put them to good use, we have the **potential** to lead good and happy lives.



2 Humanists believe the world is a **natural** place with no supernatural side (they will be atheists or agnostics). They believe that **science** and the search for **evidence** provides the best way to answer our questions about the world.



3 Humanists believe this is the **one life** we have and so we need to make the most of it. For humanists, there is no single ‘ultimate’ meaning of life. Instead, it is up to us to make our own lives **meaningful**. They believe we should be **free** to decide how we live (as long as we do not cause harm to others), seeking **happiness** and supporting others to do the same.



4 Humanists believe that the origins of our moral capacities lie inside human beings and our evolution as a social animal. They believe that, when deciding how to act, we should use reason and **empathy**, considering the consequences of our actions and the likely impact on other people and animals.



5 Humanists believe that human beings alone are **responsible** for making the world a better place. Many campaign for equality, human rights, and secularism. Many celebrate the progress humanity has made, but recognise the work that is still to be done.



“Being a humanist can be demanding. It means, when deciding what to believe or how to act, you have to do the thinking for yourself. You have to take responsibility for your own life. You have to take on what, for some, can appear like uncomfortable facts about reality. But it can also be enormously rewarding. It can be liberating and life-enhancing.”

SANDI TOKSVIG, patron of Humanists UK



DISCOVERING HUMANISM

Many humanists don't learn about humanism and then decide to adopt a humanist approach to life. Instead they discover the label 'humanist' as one that fits the approach to life that they already held.

“I was a humanist without knowing it for many years before I found the British Humanist Association – when I did, it was like finding a sort of home. Here were people with a range of views that matched my own.”

CLAIRE RAYNER,
Vice-President of Humanists UK

HUMANIST ORGANISATIONS

There is no obligation for humanists to take part in any form of organised humanism. However, many will join groups such as **Humanists UK**. Humanists UK has been around since 1896. It provides services to support non-religious people and campaigns on issues where it believes the non-religious are treated unfairly.

There are many other humanist organisations around the world – in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. They share many similar ambitions and goals. However, the rights and freedoms of non-religious people vary – in some countries it is illegal to be non-religious and one can be imprisoned or even killed. **Humanists International** is an organisation that works to support humanists and other non-religious people all around the globe.



“What being a humanist means to me is taking a stand with humanity, taking a stand inspired by human rights and human values... Humanism is a way of thinking and living that emphasises the agency of human beings. Humanism stresses the fact that we, human beings, are capable of changing the world.”

LEO IGWE, Nigerian
Humanist Association



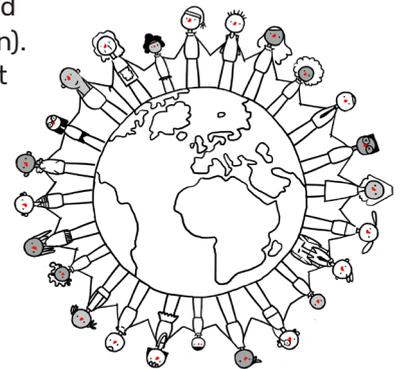
HUMANIST CEREMONIES

Many non-religious people today choose to have a humanist ceremony. This could be a naming ceremony (to celebrate the arrival of a new baby), a wedding, or a funeral. These ceremonies, carried out by a humanist **celebrant**, generally focus on the freedom of those involved to choose how they want to mark the occasion and the importance of the love and support of other people in our lives.



HOW MANY HUMANISTS ARE THERE?

Around 5% of the population of the UK use the label 'humanist' to describe themselves. However, many more share humanist beliefs and values (surveys would suggest around 20% of the population). Many have simply not heard of the word 'humanist', while others may prefer not to identify with a label.



HUMANIST HISTORY

We can find humanist ideas over 2,000 years ago in ancient India, China, and Greece. Humanist thinking became increasingly popular during a period called the Enlightenment in the 18th century. Many of the thinkers who have been influential on humanism would not have used the word 'humanist' to describe themselves. However, their approach to answering questions and making choices without the need for religion means that many humanists today see them as part of the humanist tradition.