

6 Elements of Humanism

Humanists know that Humanism is rather hard to define. The problem is that while it's a fairly simple and straightforward philosophy, it's actually a bit of a philosophic mélange, made up of several interrelated elements. For instance, in a single sentence the American Humanist Association defines Humanism by combining 6 basic statements about what Humanism is. According to the AHA, Humanism is (1) a progressive philosophy of life, (2) that without supernaturalism,(3) affirms our ability and responsibility (4) to lead ethical lives (5) of personal fulfillment (6) that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

All of the 6 elements contained in the AHA statement are important if we are to fully understand the Humanist philosophy. No one element alone defines Humanism. It is the combination that makes Humanism such a powerful philosophy. Let's consider these elements individually.

1) Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life. Simply put, Humanists don't accept the status quo, especially if the status quo involves suffering. We believe that we can and should be actively working to make things better. This alone doesn't make us Humanists, but it is an important part of our mindset.

2) Humanism is without supernaturalism. Our focus is on finding real solutions to our problems. We view supernaturalism as a distraction from the things that really matter. Just being without supernaturalism is not enough to make you a Humanist, but you can't be a Humanist unless you are without supernaturalism.

3) Humanism affirms our ability and responsibility. Human agency is central to the Humanist philosophy. We believe that humans have the ability to change things in our lives. We aren't just victims of fate waiting for the gods to take care of us. We can choose to act in a way that will make things better, not only for ourselves, but for others as well. And because we have that ability, we therefore believe we have a moral responsibility to act to make things better.

4) Humanism is about leading an ethical life. Since we can choose how to act, we choose to act in an ethical way. In fact, most Humanists strive to be the best, most ethical person they can be. This not only helps us make the world a better place, it also helps us feel better about ourselves as human beings and helps us lead happier more fulfilling lives.

5) The goal of Humanism is to live a life of personal fulfillment. Since we are without supernaturalism, we are also without an afterlife. And while a lot of people find the prospect of having only one life to live depressing, Humanist embrace it. We are alive now so we might as well make the best of it. No sense wasting this one life in hopes that you might get a second one after you die. That, to us, is defeatist talk. Better to embrace this life and live it to the fullest.

6) Humanism aspires to the greater good of humanity. Despite the fact we have every intention of living life to the fullest, we don't live our lives in a hedonistic fashion. Yes, we are individuals, but we also recognize our responsibilities to our fellow humans. We are progressive. We want to make things better. We believe we have the ability to make things better and that we have a responsibility to do so. We choose to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment and are committed to doing so in a way that not only helps ourselves, but helps others as well.

In other words, without supernaturalism we affirm our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

So, the next time you find yourself struggling to explain Humanism to someone, take heart. As complicated as it can sometimes seem, always remember that Humanism isn't rocket science. It is a very practical and humane approach to living an ethical life of personal fulfillment that aspires to the greater good of humanity. Or, more simply, live your life to fullest, love other people and leave the world a better place.

Word Count: 684

About the Author: Jennifer Hancock is the author of the book: *The Humanist Approach to Happiness Practical Wisdom* and *Jen Hancock's Handy Humanism Handbook*. She can be found on the web at: www.jenhancock.com