

What is it about Humanism?

If you think back throughout history, the names that survive are usually Humanists. Socrates, Confucius, and Buddha for instance were all promoting a Humanistic philosophy in the 6th century BCE. Most people know who these philosophers were and may even know why they are still famous. But ask people to name another philosopher from the same time period and they will most likely draw a blank, unless they are an academic who specializes in ancient philosophy.

This isn't to say that we don't remember other famous individuals. Most educated people can name a variety of famous soldiers and kings from ancient history. It is just that we don't generally remember these people for what they taught us about how to be a good person. We remember them because of their battles, monuments and in the case of King Tut, because of his treasure. The truth is, when it comes to role models, it's the Humanists who stand out.

This Humanist exceptionalism isn't just limited to ancient times. Ask people to name a famous scientist and most will name Einstein, one of the co-founders of the First Humanist Society of New York. Name a really influential TV show and people may name Star Trek, or Twilight zone, whose creators Gene Roddenberry and Rod Sterling respectively, were Humanists. Name a founding father? Thomas Jefferson, who didn't apply the term Humanist to himself, but whose writing made it clear, he was Humanistically inclined.

I could go on, but you get the idea. It's the Humanists who stand out. So what it is about the Humanist philosophy that made these people not just memorable, but influential enough that their work continues to inspire people today.

There are two aspects of the philosophy that have a very powerful impact on people. The first is our moral values. Humanist values are based on compassion and compassion is a very strong emotion to feel. It is powerful enough to mobilize people against injustice. Is it any wonder why authoritarians are so afraid of Humanism? Anyone who publicly invokes compassion by pointing out the suffering caused by established dogmas is displaying the moral courage of a hero, and everyone knows it.

The second aspect of the philosophy that makes it so powerful is that Humanism is a philosophy of the future. And not just any future, but a future

based on compassion. Where everyone is treated fairly and all people are considered to be equal, regardless of background or social status.

A positive vision of the future is critical to all social progress. In order to fight an injustice now, you have to be able to imagine a future without that injustice. And this is why Humanism is so compelling. Our vision of a better, more compassionate future is an ideal people are willing to work towards.

What Socrates, Confucius and Buddha all have in common wasn't just that they were pointing out the injustices of their time. They also shared with us their vision of how much better the world can be. Not that we should ignore the present, but that we ought to also be working towards a better future together.

It is easy to see why those whose livelihoods are invested in maintaining the status quo hate Humanism. And why so many people try to suppress Humanists who speak out against injustice. By placing morality squarely within the domain of compassion, we challenge the authority of those who claim to know better. By encouraging people to think about how WE can do better, we empower people to take responsibility for their own lives, thus challenging the power of those who would claim authority over us.

True, the world we live in still has injustice. But more and more people all across the world are embracing the Humanist vision for how the world should be. More and more people are agitating to make that dream a reality. And more and more people are fighting back in a myriad of ways against the forces that would keep us in ignorance about what our potential as humans really is.

Humanism is the most powerful force for positive social change on our planet. Let's not forget that when we talk to others about our philosophy. The more we share our positive vision of the future, and our insistence that the only morality worth contemplating is a compassion based morality, the more we give courage to others to join us.

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