



Humanism

Humanism is a philosophy or set of beliefs about life and how to live rather than a religion in the strict sense. It is hard to say how many humanists there are in the world because it is not an organised religion. However, many people are turning away from religion and instead adopting beliefs which may be described as Humanist.

Origin

The term Humanism may be quite new but Humanists see the routes of their beliefs in thousands of years of human history. For example, Ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras said 'man is the measure of all things'. This means the individual human being, rather than a god or an unchanging moral law, is the definitive source of value. Later, during a period called the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, science took huge steps forward. This led some people to question long-held religious beliefs. They thought that we should look to reason and science rather than superstition or religion when trying to find answers about the world. In the 19th century, ethical societies formed to try and bring non-religious people together to do good in the world. These eventually combined and became the Humanist Society.

Beliefs

Humanists are a sub-group of atheists: they do not believe in a God or Gods. They do not believe in a supernatural world or in a life beyond the one we have on Earth. They look to science and reason to understand the world. Whilst some religions look to their faith as a source for morality, Humanists believe it is entirely possible to have a sense of right and wrong without a religion. The motto of Humanists UK is 'Think for yourself, act for everyone'. This encapsulates the idea that Humanists do not look to a holy book or religious leaders to tell them what to do. However, humans have a responsibility to each other and to animals. We should strive to make the world a better place through our actions.



Practices

Though Humanism is not a religion, it recognises the value of ceremonies which bring people together at certain times of life such as for marriages or funerals. Humanism meets this need through non-religious ceremonies which are unique, adaptable and personal. Humanist celebrants spend time with the people involved to tailor the celebration to the people involved. They might include secular poems, readings or songs but not prayers. In general, Humanists put their beliefs into practice through the way they live their life. Since they believe we have only one life, they try to make the most of that life. They believe we need to take responsibility for our own actions and the consequences of these actions. This is the source of morality. They believe individuals should be free to pursue their own satisfaction and flourishing as long as it does not harm others. They place great importance on tolerance and equality. Humanists believe in the value of meaningful relationships with fellow humans and the world around us and they believe that we can find awe and wonder in human achievements as well as the natural world. These principles guide humanists in the absence of a set of rules imposed from a divine being or beings.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What is meant by a 'sub-group of atheists'?
2. What does *encapsulates* mean?
3. Find another word for 'non-religious'.
4. Find and copy a word or phrase which means 'work towards' or 'struggle to achieve'
5. What is meant by the word *tolerance*?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

When was the Enlightenment?

R

What term is used for someone who leads a Humanist ceremony?

S

In what way is Humanism similar to and different from a religion?

S

Which of these might best summarise Humanist beliefs?

A: There are no Gods so we should worship humans instead.

B: There are no Gods so we can do what we like.

C: There are no Gods so we should instead focus on caring for the world we have and the people in it.

P

What do you think Humanists think about education? Use the text to justify your answer.