

The Twin Pillars of Humanism

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Bay Area Humanists

www.sfhumanists.org

2 years old.

A chapter of the AHA

Monthly Lecture/Discussion (Glen Park Library, Women's Bldg)

Monthly Reading Group (Main Library)

Monthly Outings

Humanists In The Community (Food Bank, Rebuild SF)

Silicon Valley Humanists Have Been Helpful (thank you)

What Is Humanism?

Most people in the general population have only a vague idea.

- confusion with words like humanitarian
- Humanism has been used in various contexts over time.
- Religious right has claimed the secular humanism is a religion
- Humanism has greatly influenced the modern world.

Humanists themselves have differing opinions on the details of the definition.

- No central authority.
- Humanists value freethought and freedom.
- Humanism is a living philosophy so can change with time.

My Opinions

1. Definitions: How the word is commonly used.
2. Foundational Documents
3. Some current issues.

Definitions of Humanism

- **An appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority** as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a **grounding for morality**. Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfill the will of God. *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*
- A doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually **rejects supernaturalism** and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and **capacity for self-realization through reason**. *Merriam Webster Dictionary*
- The **rejection of (supernatural) religion** in favor of the **advancement of humanity by its own efforts**. *Collins Concise Dictionary*
- A **morally concerned** style of **intellectual atheism** openly avowed by only a small minority of individuals but tacitly accepted by a wide spectrum of education people in all parts of the Western world. *Oxford Companion to the Mind*
- A progressive lifestance that, **without supernaturalism**, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead **meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity**. • American Humanist Association

Naturalism

- An appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority
- rejects supernaturalism
- rejection of (*supernatural*) religion
- intellectual atheism
- Without supernaturalism

Naturalism is the philosophical conclusion that the only reality is nature, as gradually discovered by our intelligence using the tools of experience, reason, and science.

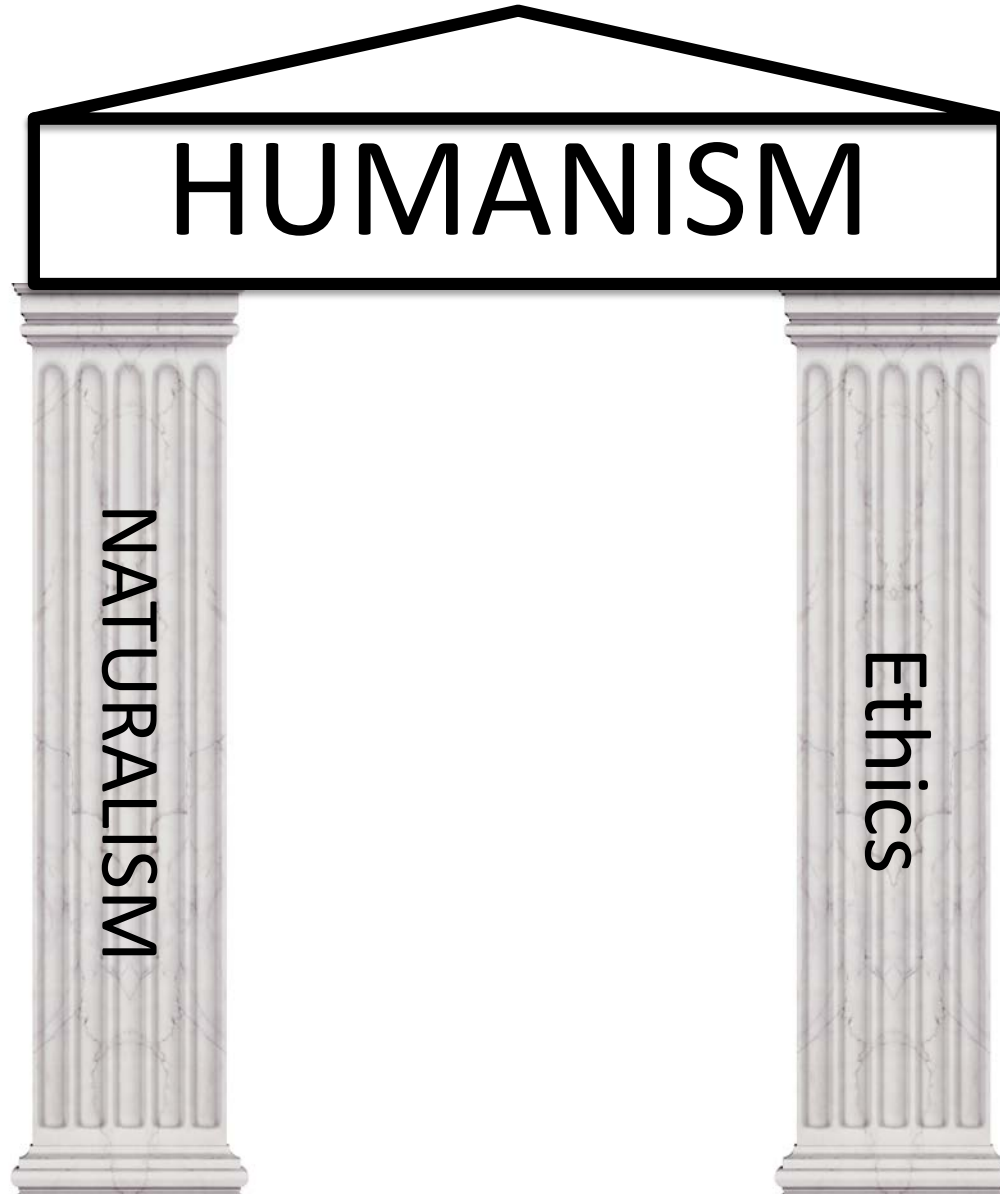
Ethics

- grounding for morality
- capacity for self-realization through reason
- advancement of humanity by its own efforts
- morally concerned
- Meaningful, ethical lives, adding to the greater good of humanity

Generally, philosophical ethics concerns itself with discovering a system one may use to determine who or what is good, or with evaluating systems that others have proposed.

In the case of humanism, an ethical system should result in human well being.

Twin Pillars of Humanism



Grounding of Ethics

- Theistic Religions
 - Divine revelation
 - frozen in patriarchal, pre-scientific and tribal thinking
- Naturalistic View
 - Humanism = Ethics grounded in human nature, need and rational thinking.

Naturalistic Understanding of Human Nature

- Humankind evolved as a social animal
- Evolved pro-social emotions that are innate.
 - Enable us to live in groups
 - Love, compassion, sense of fairness, altruism, etc
- Anti-social emotions
 - Me vs. Us and Us vs Them
 - Greed, jealousy, hate, suspicion, etc
- Humans are capable of reason.

Ethics Based on Naturalism

- This is the only life we have.
 - We should live the best life we can (happy, fulfilled, and meaningful)
- Humanity evolved from a common ancestor.
 - Human needs and desires are universal.
- We have the capacity for empathy and altruistic behaviors for kin and tribe.
- Emotions are the foundation of ethical thinking.

Reason and Emotions

- Most Enlightenment philosophers did not trust emotions; reason must control them.
- Reason is the slave of passions (emotions)-David Hume
- We use reason to justify our emotional decisions (and ethics) to ourselves and others. Jonathan Haidt (*The Righteous Mind*)
- Dual Process of Moral Judgment-Joshua Green (*The Moral Tribe*)
 - Emotions and Reasons produced by different parts of the brain
 - Emotions fast, reason slow but can suppress emotional response

Expanding the Circle

- Humans need to justify ethics, which are mediated by emotions, to self and others
- Haidt is right, we try to justify our decisions made on emotions.
- Reason requires a disinterested point of view.
- Shift to universal ethics is new and we have a long way to go to put it into practice (Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress*)

“Mankind’s Quest for the Good Has Been A Struggle Between Humanism...and Religion.”

A.C. Grayling in *What Is Good?*

- Ancient-Greek, Indian, Chinese
 - Gods not required to find a way to live a good life.
- Renaissance- Rediscovery of Greek and Roman art and philosophy
 - Shift of focus from God to Humans beings, from afterlife to this life.
- Enlightenment- scientific discovery
 - Science, reason and democracy are necessary for a good society
- 19th Century-
 - Darwin-Humans are part of nature. Moral philosophies based on reason developed (Utilitarianism)
- 20th Century
 - Molecular Genetics. Increased understanding of human social and moral development (Lawrence Kohlberg).
- 21st Century-
 - Increased understanding of neurobiological underpinnings of human emotions, thought and behavior.
 - Urgency of environmental crisis realized.

Foundational Documents

Foundational Documents of Modern Humanism

Humanist Manifesto I (1933)

Humanist Manifesto II (1973)

Humanist Manifesto III (2003)

Questions Answered By Philosophy

- How do I know what is true?
- How do I live my life?
- How do we build a good society?

How Do I Know What Is True?

(Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies.
- We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humanism Holds to Be True:

(Humanist Manifesto III)

- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.
- Humanists recognize nature as self-existing.
- We accept our life as all and enough,
- We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

How Shall We Live Our Lives?

(Humanist Manifesto III)

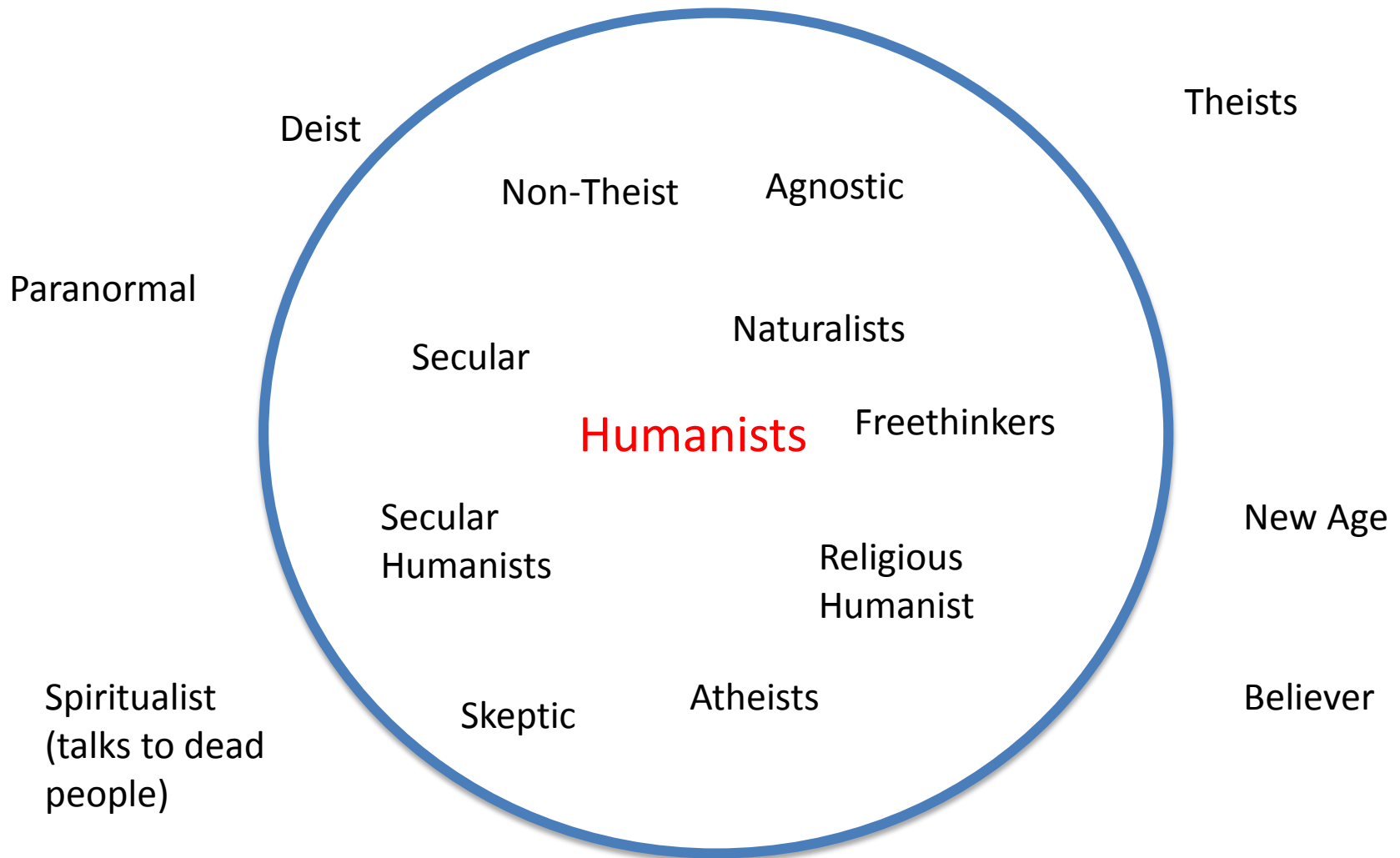
- Humanists ground values in human welfare ...extended to the global ecosystem.
- (Humanists) are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity...
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

What Is A Good Society?

(Humanist Manifesto III)

One that minimizes the inequities of circumstance and ability, and supports a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

What Shall We Call Ourselves?



What About Those Atheists?

Atheists-One who does not believe in God.

Some atheists are militant, others not.

Humanists should oppose the demonization of the word “atheists”.

Oppose atheophobia.

How Should Humanists Deal With Religion?

A virus or an evolutionary adaption?

Promotes conflicts or peace?

Promotes persecution or love?

Retards human progress or promotes human advancement?

Provides solutions to human needs or is inhumane?

Should Humanists Criticize or Bash Religion?

Humanist Elevator Speech

“The place to be happy is here on earth.
The time to be happy is now. The way to
be happy is to help make others happy.”
Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899)

End of Presentation

Discussion