

## What Does it Mean to be a Humanist?

(from Humanists International)

“A humanist is someone who recognises that we, human beings, are the most curious and the most capable curators of **knowledge** in the known universe.

1) To gain knowledge, we must use our reason and experience to understand the world. And we may create or partake of the great artistic fruits of humankind to enhance our emotional palettes, deepen our empathy and enrich our understanding. But we reject any reliance on blindly received authority, or on dogma, or what others may claim is divine revelation (because we don't believe we get tip-offs about truth from a supreme being beyond time and space. That would be cheating!).

A humanist is someone who recognises that we, human beings, are by far the most sophisticated moral actors on the Earth. We can grasp **ethics**.

2) This does not mean we are the only moral objects. For example other animals deserve moral consideration, too, and perhaps the environment as a whole.

3) It is also worth noting that some other (non-human) animals exhibit patterns of behaviour that look a lot like care, empathy, in a few cases even apparently responding to what looks like 'unfair' behaviour by seeking to redress it! These different types and stages of animals thinking about others may be taken as evidence of how ethical behaviour evolved in human beings. However, humans do seem to have a unique capacity for moral choice. It would be unusual for example to say that a dog or a dolphin had behaved “immorally”! But when it comes to humans, we are able to choose to act in the interests of the welfare of living things, advancement of society, and fulfillment of our own and others personal goals... or against them! This choice and our knowledge of that choice makes us 'moral actors'.

4) To act well, we must take responsibility for ourselves and others. We do not do this for the sake of preferential treatment in any afterlife (even if we believed in it, that motivation wouldn't make our actions good!). We do it

because the best we can do is to live this life as brilliantly as we can. That means helping others in community, advancing society, and flourishing at whatever we do best within those bounds.

And humanists are people who find **value** in themselves and each other, respecting the personhood and dignity of fellow human beings.

5) We respect other people not because we are made “in the image” of something else (we are a product of evolution, not the product of a divine plan), but because of what we are. We are a sentient, feeling species, with value and dignity in each individual, and that is worthy of respect.

There is no reason to believe that “meaning” has to come from a supreme being. If you can write a sentence on paper which isn’t nonsense, then you can create **meaning**!

6) For a humanist, there is no divine plan or purpose. The humanist recognises that we make our own purposes, tell our own stories, set our own goals. This gives life meaning.”

<https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/>