Humanism: Meaning, Origin & Development
Chapter 1

Humanism: Meaning, Origin & Development

Humanism is:

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings," Chambers Pocket Dictionary.

"...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.

"...a non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values." Little Oxford Dictionary

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural would 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 fulfilling the will of God." Oxford Companion to Philosophy
"...the rejection of religion in favour of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts." Collins Concise Dictionary.

"That which is characteristically human, not supernatural, that which belongs to man and not to external, that which raises man to his greatest height or gives him, as man, his greatest satisfaction." Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences

"A system of thought that centers on human and their values, capacities, and worth." American Heritage Dictionary.

**An exploration into Humanism**

The exact point of time when the term "Humanism" was first adopted is unknown. It is, however, certain that Italy and the re-adopting of Latin letters as the staple of human culture were responsible for the name of Humanists. *Litero humaniores* was an expression coined in reference to the classic literature of Rome and the imitation and reproduction of its literary forms in the new learning; this was in contrast to and against the Literoe Sacroe of scholasticism. In the time of Ariosto, Erasmus, and Luther's beginnings, the
term amanita was in effect as equivalent to the terms "classicist" or Classical Scholar.

The word "Humanism" has a number of meanings and because authors and speakers often don't clarify which meaning they intend, those trying to explain Humanism can easily become a source of confusion. Fortunately, each meaning of the word constitutes a different type of Humanism - the different types being easily separated and defined by the use of appropriate adjectives. So let me summarize the different varieties of Humanism in this way.

Literary Humanism is a devotion to the humanities or literary culture.

Renaissance Humanism is the spirit of learning that developed at the end of the middle ages with the revival of classical letters and renewed confident in the ability of human beings to determine for themselves truth and falsehood.

Cultural Humanism is the rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, evolved throughout European history, and now
constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science, political theory, ethics, and law.

Philosophical Humanism is any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest. Subcategories of this type include Christian Humanism and Modern Humanism.

Christian Humanism is defined by Webster's Third New International Dictionary as "a philosophy advocating the self-fulfillment of man within the framework of Christian principles." This more human-oriented faith is largely a product of the Renaissance and is a part of what made up Renaissance Humanism.

Modern Humanism, also called Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism and Democratic Humanism is defined by one of its leading proponents, Cordless Lamont, as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion. Modern Humanism has a dual origin both seculars and religious, and these constitute its subcategories.
Secular Humanism is an outgrowth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free thought. Many secular groups, such as the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism and the American Rationalist Federation, and many otherwise unaffiliated academic philosophers and scientists, advocate this philosophy.

Religious Humanism emerged out of Ethical Culture, Unitarianism, and Universalism. Today, many Unitarian-Universalism congregations and all Ethical Culture societies describe themselves as humanist in the modern sense.

The most critical irony in dealing with Modern Humanism is the inability of its advocates to agree on whether or not his worldview is religious. Those who see it as philosophy are the Secular Humanists while those who see it as religion are Religious Humanists. This dispute has been going on since the early years of this century when the secular and religious traditions converged and brought Modern Humanism into existence.

The project of the Humanist Movement is to eradicate war, hunger poverty and economic exploitation
across the planet and develops a new system based on the value of human life as the central value, higher than money power and prestige etc. This vision of the future is called the “Universal Human Nation”. The methodology used, is to work in groups and undertake personal development activities as well as social projects. Once sufficiently experienced, new groups developed according to their interests.

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The life stance of Humanism - guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience, encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continued to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that value and ideas, however carefully worth, are subject to change as our knowledge and understanding advances. It is in this sense that the following points can be concluded.
Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for deterring this knowledge as well for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. They also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience - each subject is to be analyzed by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. They accept their life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. They welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be know.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. They are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in context of freedom consonant with responsibility.
Life’s fulfillments emerge from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. They aim for their fullest possible development and animate their lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the life stance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches their lives, encourages them to enrich the lives of other and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximized individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society and to develop global
community. They seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and they support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. They work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain. It is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

So, in a nut shell it can be summarized that Humanism is a philosophy of life inspired by humanity and guided by reason. It provides the basis for a fulfilling and ethical life without religion.

- Humanists make sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values.
- Humanists see no convincing evidence for gods, the supernatural or for life after death.
Humanists believe that moral values are properly founded on human empathy and scientific understanding.

Humanists believe we must live this life on the basis that it is the only life we'll have, therefore, we must make the most of it for ourselves, each other, and our world.

**Humanism: Origin & Development**

Humanism has often been portrayed as a Western invention, but in fact humanist ideas have taken shape in different cultures all over the world. India and China, for example, have a rich history of humanist and naturalistic philosophy dating back at least three thousand years.

The Lokayata movement, which thrived in India around 1000 BCE, criticized the Hindu religion of the day and developed a naturalistic philosophy of the cosmos. Four hundred years later, in the sixth century BCE, the Charvaka school of thought maintained that Hindu scripture is false, that there are no gods, that
there is no immortal soul, that the priests are worthless and that pleasure should be the aim of life. In addition to their naturalistic view of the cosmos, the Charvaka promoted a moral philosophy centered on human welfare. In the Mahabharata (the ancient Hindu epic poem) one of the Charvaka was put to death for criticizing the king's war-mongering.¹

Chinese philosophers of the sixth century BCE were also notable for their development of humanistic ethical philosophies and their skepticism about the supernatural. Their criticism of supernatural claims was often sly. For example, the great Taoist teacher Loa Tse (early to middle of the sixth century BCE) indicated his skepticism about supernatural claims when he said, "If lightning is the anger of the gods, the gods are concerned mostly with trees."

In general, Chinese philosophers suggested that nothing could be known about the spiritual realm, rather than denying that such a realm existed. This agnosticism about supernatural claims led to humanist conclusions. The great teachers of the sixth century

BCE argued that since humans could have no clear knowledge of the supernatural realm, supernatural claims could never proved a sound foundation for morality. They maintained that the best foundation for morality was an understanding of the natural world, human nature and society.

The most famous of these teachers is Confucius. The Confucians tried to replace traditional religious beliefs with an ethical system focused on responsibility to family and society. Confucianism emphasizes benevolence, respect for others, and reciprocity as the foundations of social order. An early expression of the Golden Rule of ethics is found in The Analects (the collected sayings) of Confucius: "Do not do to others what you would not like for yourself." The Confucians dismissed questions about the spiritual realm; instead promoting a practical outlook that rendered the gods irrelevant. According to tradition, when Confucius was asked how one should serve ghosts and spirits, he replied, "Until you have learned to serve men, how you can serve ghosts."

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the Greek world experienced a cultural flowering that was to
transform human civilization. Many of history's most influential philosophers, historian dramatists, and statesmen lived in Athens and other Greek city-states within a period of just three or four generations. This explosion in human understanding played an essential role in creating the world we live in today.

Classical Greece was extraordinary in many ways. Its drama and art almost as influential in shaping the modern world as its philosophy and politics, in all of these areas, Greek culture is notable for its focus on humanity. Whether in statues, celebrating the human body, in plays, exploring the human condition, in politics, that created the first democracies, or in philosophy that recognized that "Man is the measure of all things, Greek culture explored and celebrated humanity."²

Like the Chinese philosophers of the same period, the Greek philosophers of the sixth century BCE did not so much deny the existence of gods, and argued that they were unknowable and irrelevant. Therefore, they

²www.iep.utm/h/humanism.html
tried to develop knowledge and morality in reference to humanity instead of divinity.

The focus on the human rather than the divine is well illustrated by the philosopher Protagoras (ca. 481-411 BCE). In his work Of the Gods, Protagoras said, "About the gods I have no means of knowing either that they exist or that they do not exist or what they are like to look at; many things prevent my knowing - among other, the fact that they are never seen and the shortness of human life." Protagoras also made a statement often associated with Humanism: "Man is the measure of all things, of the reality of those which are, and of the unreality of those which are not."³

Protagoras may also have developed the questioning dialogue as a means of seeking truth. But this method of inquiry is most associated with Socrates (ca. 469-399). The Socratic Method can be seen as profoundly humanistic in the way it encourages that type of inquiry that is open to all parties. The great religious prophets of human history claimed to bring "God's truth" and absolute commandments, whereas

³ www.historyguide.org.uk/humanism
Socrates is famous for saying he knew nothing and brought not answers, but a method of questioning.

Other naturalistic philosophers and schools, such as Aristotle, the Atomists and the Stoics developed crucial ideas about nature and humanity that still influence humanist thought to this day. The ancient thinker who may have been closest to the ideas and temper of modern Humanism was Epicurus (ca. 341–241 BCE)

Following the materialist philosophy of the Atomists, Epicurus argued that every thing in the cosmos was ultimately composed of material atoms and that all of our knowledge of the world came from our senses. Epicurus suggested that two things prevent people from trying to live a full and happy life: fear of the gods and fear of an afterlife but the materialist philosophy of the atomist renewed the fear of the supernatural and the fear of death. Death meant annihilation for the person, because the mind (or soul) is composed of atoms that disperse upon death. Epicurus spoke of his "Four Herbs" to relieve the maladies of life:
There is nothing to fear from gods,
There is nothing to feel in death,
Good can be attained,
Evil can be endured.⁴

Epicurus described the purpose of philosophy as "the art of making life happy." He argued that nature and reasons both show that pleasure is the sole good and that pain the sole evil. But, contrary to some caricatures, the Epicureans did not encourage wanton indulgence in sensual pleasures. Epicurus argued that intellectual pleasures were better than physical pleasures - although both were necessary to live a full and happy life - and that "tranquility of the soul" was a key component of pleasure. Hedonistic indulgences might lead to short-term gratification, but one avoids them if they will cause disturbance and suffering in the longer term.

The Renaissance started as a movement to regain the intellectual glories of the ancient world, but ended by giving birth to the modern world. The

⁴ www.iep.utm/h/humanism.html
Renaissance (from the French term meaning "rebirth") describes the period in European history beginning in the late fourteenth century and continuing through the early seventeenth century. The characteristic intellectual outlook of the period is known as "Renaissance Humanism".

"Renaissance Humanism" marks the transition between medieval supernaturalism and the scientific and secular outlook of modernity. While Modern Humanism owes much to Renaissance Humanism, there are some important distinctions between the two forms of Humanism. Contemporary humanists do not believe in God or the supernatural whereas most Renaissance humanists believed in a god, often the traditional Christian God. What both kinds of humanists have in common is a focus on the concern of this world, a belief in the "dignity of man" and a commitment to developing human potential.

As the Renaissance progressed, leading thinkers became increasingly skeptical of medieval Christian dogma. The Church's response to these new ideas was often brutal. The Italian scientist Giordano Burn (1548-1600) defended Copernicus's view that the Earth orbited the sun, criticized Christian ethics, and
called for tolerance of differing religious belief. In 1600 the inquisition burned Bruno at the stake of refusing to recant these views.\(^5\)

Galileo Galilee (1564-1642) also suffered at the hands of the inquisition for promoting the Copernican view that the Earth orbited the sun. He avoided execution by renouncing his views. Galileo can be seen as the most important figure in the birth of modern science. His many discoveries revolutionized humanity's understanding of the cosmos and he successfully argued that observation, experiment, and mathematically quantified measurement were the essential bases for scientific study of the world.

At the same time as Galileo, the English philosopher Francis Bacon was arguing in favour of science based on reason and factual evidence. Bacon was not a great scientist like Galileo, but he played a crucial role in articulating and promoting the new empirical science. Bacon saw that in addition to increasing human understanding, science could be used to benefit human kind. In *Novum Organum*, his most

\(^5\)www.spaceandmotion.com/Philosophy-humanism.html
important work, he argued that humanity should "Pursue science in order that the human estate may be advanced.

It was this commitment to the scientific study of the world, combined with the increasing secularism and individualism of European culture that gave birth to the Enlightenment – the Age of Reason of the eighteenth century.

The Humanism strengthened its root firstly in Italy through the teaching of Petrarch and his disciple Boccaccio. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century the heroic age of Humanism blossomed notably in Florence under the leadership of Caluccio Salutati. In the fifteenth century Humanism spread from Florence to other cities like Rome and Naples. The invasion of Charles VIII in France in 1494 and the sack of Rome in 1527 by troops of Emperor Charles marked the end of dominance of Humanism as a movement in Italian culture though Humanism continued to thrive through 16th century developing theories of literary interpretation canons of critical scholarship related to restoring ancient texts in the 16th century the Humanism kept on spreading in Germany, France and England before the movement was incorporated into the larger struggles
related to the protest reformation. Patriarch and Bocaccio were the first generation of humanists to make Humanism visible to the cultured world. The second generation was led by Caluccio Salutati. He introduced the teaching of Greece into Florence, encouraged the discovery and copying of manuscripts.⁶

The third generation of Humanism is represented by a number of important figures viz. Pogoro Bracciolini (1380-1459) Bicolor Nicola (1364-1437) Leonardo Brunu (1370-1444) Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439). A number of Greeks came to Italy for the council of Ferrara-Florence in the 1430, convened at the request of the Byzantine church to implore help in the face of the Turkish-Muslim threat to the Byzantine Empire. That led to its collapse in 1453. The most important consequence for Florence was the introduction of Platonism by some of the Greek present and the subsequent development of a "Platonic Academy" in Florence.

The earliest humanists in France, as in England and Germany, became so by travelling to and studying in Italy. Guillaume (William) Fichet (1433-92) returned

⁶ Internet: www.spaceandmotion.com/Philosophy/humanism.html
from Italy in 1470, set up a press in the basement of the Sorbonne for the printing of humanist literature, and lectured on the classical Latin poets. But he returned to Italy in 1472 and remained there until his death. His place was taken by Robert Gaguin (1433-1501), the leader of the classical revival in France for the next 25 years.

Lefe'vre d' Etaples (Latin name: Faber Stapulensis, 1455-1536) lived in the Academy at Florence and was much influenced by the Neo-Platonism of Marsilio Ficino (1433-99). But after 1500 he turned his attention to the Christian fathers, publishing the works of a numbers of them. From the fathers he moved back to the Bible. His greatest accomplishment was his translation of the Bible; he published the New Testament in 1523 and the Old Testament in 1528. The entire translation was published together in 1530. After the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation he devoted himself to church reform, but he never broke with the Catholic Church.

7. www.jcn.com/Philosophy-humanism.html
A number of humanists helped developing Greek studies in France; one Frenchman, Guillaume Bude (1468–1540) made notable contributions to the study of both Latin and Greek classical antiquity, through his commentary of Roman law, the Pandects; and his study of classical coinage, De Asse (1515). After he wrote The Education of a Prince, the king called him to court where he served as an adviser. He was instrumental in having the College de France made trilingual. He also had some contact with John Calvin; his children became Calvinists.

Germany followed the same pattern as France: Italian influence mingled with native pietistic traditions, resulting after 1500 in a strong humanist movement. The initiators of German Humanism were Rudolf Agricola (1444-85) who studied in Italy for ten years (1469-79), then returned to Germany where he taught until his death.8

Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522) was the first humanist to know Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He studied Hebrew from 1492 and published the first Hebrew grammar in

8. Internet: www.historyguide/Humanism-and-Education.html
1506. He published a commentary on the Cabala in 1517. His sympathy for ancient Jewish literature led to conflict with those (especially a converted Jew named Pfefferkorn) who wanted all Jewish books buried, a conflict that involved most leading humanists of the time. His supporters published a defense entitled Letters of Obscure Men, 1517), ridiculing his enemies. The struggle was a precursor of the Protestant Reformation in which Humanists would also have to take sides.

In this way the clash between the ideas and views and the intellectual difference between their supporters and the struggle for life and survival of the scholars led the Humanism to take different shapes and come to different points as it is presently.

In the next chapter we will discuss how humanism stands in relation to Art and in relation to Literature.

**Humanism: In Relation to Art & Literature**

Many scholars refer to Humanism as the Spirit of the Renaissance. Humanism was a lay phenomenon that
emphasized human beings as opposed to deities as well as their interests, achievements and capabilities. Humanism is derived from the Latin word *humanitas*, which Cicero, of the Roman Empire, referred to as the literary culture needed by anyone who would be considered educated and civilized.

**Humanism and Literature**

Usually Humanists looked for wisdom in the past culture. They followed the lifestyle of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They also traced their families back to the days of the ancient Romans. They endeavored on archaeological expeditions to recover ancient manuscripts, statues and monuments so that they may better understand human nature. The Christian humanists, were sometimes skeptical as to the authority of the ancient writers. Medieval humanists accepted pagan and classical authors uncritically. The humanists of the Renaissance, viewed the classics from a Christian perspective, Man is created in Gods image. They rejected any classical ideas that opposed Christianity but sometimes found an underlying harmony between secular and pagan ideas and their religion.
In the era of Renaissance, the humanists were fascinated by the language of the classics and thought it was finer and purer than the corrupt Latin. They became more concerned with form rather than content. Literary humanists wrote in the style of the ancient writers. The leading humanists of the time were rhetoricians. They held discussions in the same style used in the ancient Platonian Academy. They also sought more effective and eloquent methods of communication, not only in written literature but also in their speech.

Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola wrote an essay entitled Oration on the Dignity of Man, in which he said that the reason for man's dignity is that he was created in God's image. He said that man's place in the universe is between the beasts and the angels, but because of his divine image he can choose his fate and he is not bound to be fall the prey of destiny. Man can achieve higher ranks.

Another literary humanist of the renaissance was Erasmus, who wrote The Shipwreck. Erasmus was a satirist who, in The Shipwreck, made fun of the way, people practiced their religions. He depicted how some
people were hypocritical, they say one thing but practice something else. He also made fun of people who made extravagant offerings to many saints and gods alike. His approach was that of a satirist of the established norms of society, by making caricature of it. He felt an affinity for Lucian; his Encomium Morioe, a vitriolic satire, dealt not gently with clerical corruption. He edited the New Testament and dedicated it to Leo X. He had no desire to abandon the old Church, considering the bounties and pensions which he received were all derived from princes or clerics who adhered to the papacy. He pretended that he could not read the German writings of Luther. Erasmus wrote that “Luther’s movement was not connected with learning,” and at the same time he wrote to Pope Hadrian VI, “I could find a hundred passages where St. Paul seems to teach the doctrines which they condemn in Luther”. “Other utterances show his unwillingness to serve the Reformation or to be held responsible for any part of it: I have written nothing which can be laid hold of against the established orders… I would rather see things left as they are than to see a revolution which may lead to one knows not
what. Others may be martyrs, if you must take a side, take the situations and realities with wonderful clearness; but his genius, like that of many scholars, was essentially negative.” Much concerned with religious humanism, Erasmus deftly wielded his gift of writing as instrument of peace. In particular, his writings held a tremendous amount of sway in Northern Europe. He was renowned for his pacific views, which he poignantly enumerates in Against War. He felt that war was senseless since it only caused destruction and death.

**Humanism and Art**

In the annals of history, art has been used by the church to impart education to illiterates. Church invested money to decorate its churches and cathedrals, with art depicting scenes from the Bible. Even if not commissioned by the church, artists opted for depicting Biblical scenes. As Humanism became more widespread in Europe, however, art steadily became more secular. As classical texts brought about a deeper understanding of the ancient cultures, classical themes such as pagan gods appeared more often in art. Religious art,
however, never disappeared. Artists depicted scenes differently. For example, medieval artist’s depiction of Genesis showed the fall from the grace of Adam and Eve, whereas Renaissance artists depicted the creation of man. Normal looking people also entered into the artwork. Artists depicted humans as humans and did not give them unnatural qualities as they had in the past. As people became conscience of their uniqueness, they wanted themselves to be immortalized in art. Artists also often made self-portraits or portrayed themselves in the background of their artwork. By and by art began to reflect more accurately and honestly.

In the renaissance, a new style of art called “International Style”, appeared. It was characterized by rich colour, decorative details, curvilinear rhythm and swaying forms. Since it was used by several artists across the western countries, it was designated as “International Style”.

As humanism spread, artists became more interested with the human body. Donatello, who was appreciated for his variety in human nature, revived the nude as the subject of art in the Renaissance by creating a life-size statue of David from the Bible. The David he
depicted was a lanky youth who did not look like a hero, but the expression on the statue's face showed a man proud to have slain a Giant. Michelangelo, however, depicted more heroic looking men. His depiction of David showed a strong looking man. In general, the artists of this period depicted the human body in a more scientific and natural manner. The female body was voluptuous and sensual while the male body was showing maleness and heroism; the spirit of secularism was running as undercurrent in the glorification of human body in natural dress.

As the social status of the artist improved, rich and powerful people commissioned artists to create works for their private collections or for public places. Merchants, noble men and princes supported the art as a method of glorifying themselves. Artists depended on their patrons for support. Society respected and rewarded the artist as a genius. The social status of a distinguished artist would be secure for eternity. It could also become possible for an artist to receive formal education easily under the supervision of any seasoned Guru.
Youngman in The Courtier said that the educated man of the upper class should be well educated in many subjects, at a same time his spiritual and physical capabilities should be trained and he should be familiar with dance, music and art. The Courtier was widely read in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and imparted a strong influence on the conduct of elite groups in the Renaissance and early modern Europe.⁹

A new form of education called Studia Humanitatis also appeared. Studia Humanitatis or the study of humanity was a new form of education where one learned to cultivate his talents. It had a new program of studies: rhetoric, grammar, history, vernacular harmony, moral philosophy and poetry. Students read many great texts from the past and learned about the dilemmas that people have had so that they can think before hand about what to do, should they ever encounter the same situation. Their top preferences were the history of Greece and Rome and their literature because they deem it to be grater than that of any other part of the world.

⁹ www.historyguide/Humanism-and-Education.html
Some Prominent Humanists of the World

Here is a list of some of the famous and prominent Humanists of the world, including both Secular Humanists and Religious Humanists.

- Philip Adams
- Steve Allen
- Isaac Asimov
- Margaret Atwood
- Sir Arthur C. Clarke
- Richard Dawkins
- Daniel C. Dennett
- John Dewey
- Sanal Edamaruku
- Albert Einstein
- Gareth Evans
• Raymond Firth

• Tim Flannery

• E.M. Forster

• Betty Friedan Erich Fromm

• John Kenneth Galbraith

• Murray Gell-Mann

• Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

• Whoopi Goldberg

• Stephen Jay Gould

• Bill Hayden

• Henrik Ibsen

• Steve Irwin

• Ron Karenga

• Helen Keller
• Paul Kurtz

• Corliss Lamont

• John Lennon Thomas Mann

• Abraham H. Maslow

• Michel de Montaigne

• Farley Mowat

• Taslima Nasrin

• Philip Nietzsche

• David L. Norton

• George Orwell

• Linus Pauling

• Steven Pinker

• Charles Francis Potter

• Philip Pullam
• A. Phillip Randolph

• Gene Roddenberry

• Carl Rogers

• Bertrand Russell

• Carl Sagan

• Andrei Sakharov

• Michael Shermer

• Peter Singer

• Barbara Smoker

• Gloria Steinem

• Oliver Stone

• Albert Schweitzer

• Osamu Tezuka

• Ted Turner

• Alice Walker
• Nicolas Walter

• Ibn Warraq

• Robyn Williams

• E.O. Wilson

• Edwin H. Wilson

• Sherwin T. Wine: Rabbi and founder of Society for Humanistic Judaism.

• British Humanist Association

• American Humanist Association