

What Is Secular Humanism?

"Taxonomically, my family is Freethinker (including atheists, skeptics, agnostics); my genus is Humanist (including the religion-based), and my species is Secular."

— John Rafferty

Secular. "Pertaining to the world or things not spiritual or sacred."

Humanism. "Any system of thought or action concerned with the interests or ideals of people ... the intellectual and cultural movement ... characterized by an emphasis on human interests rather than ... religion."

— Webster's Dictionary

Secular humanism is a comprehensive, nonreligious lifestance incorporating:

- **A naturalistic philosophy**
- **A cosmic outlook rooted in science**
- **A consequentialist ethical system**

Let's examine these items one by one:

A comprehensive, nonreligious lifestance

Secular humanism is *comprehensive*, touching every aspect of life including issues of values, meaning, and identity. Thus it is broader than atheism, which concerns only the nonexistence of god or the supernatural. Important as that may be, there's a lot more to life ... and secular humanism addresses it.

Secular humanism is *nonreligious*, espousing no belief in a realm or beings imagined to transcend ordinary experience.

Secular humanism is a *lifestance*, or what Council for Secular Humanism founder Paul Kurtz has termed a *eupraxsophy*: a body of principles suitable for orienting a complete human life. As a *secular* lifestance, secular humanism incorporates the Enlightenment principle of *individualism*, which celebrates emancipating the individual from traditional controls by family, church, and state, increasingly empowering each of us to set the terms of his or her own life.

A naturalistic philosophy

Secular humanism is philosophically *naturalistic*. It holds that nature (the world of everyday physical experience) is all there is, and that reliable knowledge is best obtained when we query nature using the scientific method. Naturalism asserts that supernatural entities like God do not exist, and warns us that knowledge gained without appeal to the natural world and without impartial review by multiple observers is unreliable.

A cosmic outlook rooted in science

Secular humanism provides a *cosmic outlook*—a world-view in the broadest sense, grounding our lives in the context of our universe and relying on methods demonstrated by science. Secular humanists see themselves as undesigned, unintended beings who arose through evolution, possessing unique attributes of self-awareness and moral agency.

A consequentialist ethical system

Secular humanists hold that ethics is *consequential*, to be judged by results. This is in contrast to so-called command ethics, in which right and wrong are defined in advance and attributed to divine authority. "No god will save us," declared *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), "we must save ourselves." Secular humanists seek to develop and improve their ethical principles by examining the results they yield in the lives of real men and women.