

Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers



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FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOMS WE DEFEND

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SUBJECT: Humanism Background and Philosophy



1. The following document provides an overview of Humanism as a distinctive group seeking support from the military chaplaincy, as required by various chaplaincy regulations. Humanism refers to deeply held beliefs, core values, and community that are central to a person's identity. Attention to "good without god" core values supports the character and resiliency of military personnel and their families.
2. Humanism is the primary group identifier presented for use in official documentation, and the Happy Human logo, above, is the primary icon. "Humanist" is a common collective identifier that refers to those who may identify as nontheist, atheist, agnostic, humanist, pastafarian, bright, freethinker, or other designations. While terminology and emblems are varied, there are core philosophical foundations that are held in common regardless of labels:
 - a. **Scientific naturalism** sees the lens of science as the best way to understand the world, assigning certainty only according to the weight of evidence. Humanists are skeptical of evidence through any source, especially revelation, tradition, or authority.
 - b. **Right actions** follow from an **ultimate value of human-flourishing**, human-based rational ethics and our evolved empathy and instincts as social animals. Tools such as deontology, virtue ethics, consequentialism, and utilitarianism are used in concert to create a solid foundation for ethical action in any given situation.
 - c. A humanist **makes meaning in life** by viewing the world through the lens of scientific naturalism, acting according to human-based, rational ethics, and by seeking lasting personal fulfillment through the advancement of oneself, one's community, and humanity.
 - d. Also see Humanism and Its Aspirations, a widely-accepted humanist values statement.
3. The history of humanism can be traced back to the naturalistic ethics of pre-Socratic philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Epicurus. The movement has an unbroken history from the Italian Renaissance to the Enlightenment to Founders such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine and modern organizations in the 19th and early 20th centuries such as the American Ethical Union and American Humanist Association.
4. A 2011 Survey by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission found Humanists to constitute 3.61% of all military personnel, which was the 6th largest of 22 categories. This result is consistent with prior military and civilian reports from the Defense Manpower Data Agency, Pew Foundation, and the American Religious Identification Survey. The humanist population is significant and needs support.
5. Chaplains are required to serve all military personnel, but as a naturalistic philosophy, humanism has no divine worship, hierarchical clergy, scripture, or divine truth/dogma. As such, humanists *generally* do not identify with terms such as "faith," "worship," or "religion." Traditional religions and traditional religious terms are common in the chaplaincy regulations but should be applied with care to humanists.
6. While humanists have no prescribed time or mode of services, they benefit from community activities such as discussion, music, intellectual lectures, and social interaction. These are best led by a fellow humanist rather than a leader (or chaplain) from a traditional faith group.

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