

Definition of Humanities

If the humanities are the study of what makes us human, then to define the humanities we must define what it means to be human. Is being human scientific? Spiritual? Emotional? I don't believe the idea of experiencing what it means to be human is universal. So, for me being human is the empathy and connection you feel to others in your most vulnerable moments. For example, Phillip Gourevitch experienced a moment like this during his recounting of the Rwandan Genocide: "I saw, though he did not notice, that his foot had rolled on a skull and broken it. For the first time at Nyarubuye my feelings focused, and what I felt was a small but keen anger at this man. Then I heard another crunch, and felt a vibration underfoot. I had stepped on one, too."¹ Gourevitch's sympathy for the dead Rwandan's and anger at the man who unknowingly disrespected them is quickly changed to empathy and connection with the man. This connection occurred because of the vulnerability Gourevitch's emotions and mind had in such an intense moment. A moment like this is what it defines to be human; the ability to form a raw connection with another no matter the circumstances when put in a vulnerable position.

¹ Gourevitch, Phillip. *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1998. 20