

What is Humanism ?

What do humanists believe?

Humanists believe:

- that we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs;
- that we only have one life and we should make the best of it, creating meaning and purpose for ourselves and making sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values;
- that we should try to live happy and fulfilled lives and help others to do so;
- that the way to achieve this is to live responsibly, thinking rationally about right and wrong, considering the consequences of our actions and trying to do the right thing

Humanism is an ethical worldview, not just an atheistic or agnostic one.

What's it all about?

Humanists ask themselves the same questions as everyone else: Why am I here? What's the purpose of life? How did life begin? What will happen to me when I die? Religious people often come up with answers based on faith in God; humanists look for answers based on reason, experience and shared human values. Humanists look for evidence before they believe things – and so they are likely to believe what scientists or their own experiences tell them, or to remain open-minded about questions, rather than to believe what someone else says. Humanists tend to think about these big questions for themselves. Some questions may not have answers, or we might not like the most probable answers. Religious answers to these questions may not be the best ones.

Enjoy life

"Happiness is the only good...the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to make others so," wrote Robert Ingersoll, a prominent American humanist in the nineteenth century. One way to make others happy is to be happy yourself and humanists do not believe in pointless self-denial. It is reasonable to enjoy the good things in life - such as friendship, the arts, and the natural world - if you can do so without harming others or the environment.

About religion

Humanists are agnostic (a-gnostic = without knowledge) because they think that we cannot know for sure the answers to some of the big

questions about life, including whether God exists or not. Because there is no evidence for the existence of God or for an after-life, humanists live their lives as atheists (a-theist = without god), and find other reasons for living good lives.

Can you be good without gods?

Humans have evolved as a social and co-operative species - we need to live and work together. Very few of us could survive long or be happy without other people. Humanists believe that morality is based on human nature and experience alone; it has not come from a god or sacred text or authority. Because we all depend on each other, it is sensible to treat other people as we would like to be treated ourselves and to work together to solve problems. Humanists have often been very active in charitable work, education and social reform, and played important parts in setting up organisations like the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and Oxfam.

What about Christmas?

People often wonder what humanists do at Christmas or Easter, which are essentially Christian festivals. Like most people, humanists enjoy holidays, exchanging presents, seeing family, going to parties – and are quite happy to have holidays to cheer up the darkest days of winter and to welcome the beginning of spring or the new year. Many of our festivals are much older than Christianity, and were simply adopted by early Christians as good times to celebrate.

What do humanists do about births, marriages and deaths?

They celebrate the first two and grieve over deaths, like everyone else. At these important times people often look to their religions to provide an appropriate ceremony, but humanists are not obliged to mark these occasions in any particular way or even at all, if they do not wish to. But non-religious people often do like to mark these moments with special ceremonies, preferably without hypocrisy, and the BHA can help them. Humanist weddings can be carried out anywhere and for anyone, and the couple involved can choose exactly the words and music they want. Babies can be welcomed in baby-naming ceremonies, where family and friends show their love and happiness and parents can choose guardians or mentors to help bring up the baby. When humanists die, their lives can be commemorated in a humanist ceremony; humanists believe that we live on in the memories of family and friends and in the work we do in our lives.

Humanist history

Humanist ideas are part of a long tradition of scepticism , atheism and belief in a non-religious basis for morality. Many famous philosophers, scientists and writers are part of that tradition.
