

From Atheism to Humanism

A compact guide to 8 humanist values



Citizenship



Knowledge



Relationships



Personal integrity



Challenges



Happiness



Meaning and purpose



Environment



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HUMANIST VALUES

Introduction

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From Atheism to Humanism...

Humanist visitors to schools often get asked by students, "What's the difference between atheism and Humanism?". Atheism simply means not having a belief in any god whether it's the Christian God, the Muslim God, the 300 million gods of Hinduism and so on. By itself, atheism says nothing about how you are going to live your life. It reveals nothing about your values.

Humanism, on the other hand, is all about values. It starts from non-religious premises. Humanists do not believe that our ethics and morals come from God or religion. Humanists believe that morality is a natural human capacity which has evolved to enable us to live together co-operatively in groups.

Humanist morality has not been written down in any scriptures or on blocks of stone. But that does not mean that individual humanists can just make it up for themselves. We learn a lot of our morality when we are socialised by our families and schools. We know the basics by the time we are five years old. For example, we learn very early on that fairness is a core ethical principle.

So the bulk of our morality is passed on via the socialisation process. As we get older, we test the boundaries of this inherited morality and we are encouraged to think about moral dilemmas.

We can also learn from a long tradition of ethical philosophy going back to Socrates and

Aristotle. The most basic humanist ethical question is this: "What is a good life?". The humanist ethical tradition invites us to think about this question for ourselves rather than adopt an 'off-the-shelf' answer which may not be a good fit with our needs today.

A humanist ten commandments?

Many humanist thinkers have suggested alternative versions of the ten commandments but these should be understood as thought experiments to stimulate our own thinking rather than authoritative lists. Humanism is not the sort of thing which should become fossilised in a strict set of 'commandments'. The latest example is the American Humanist Association's *Ten Commitments* which can be found in the further resources section.

The idea for this booklet came from a 'meta-analysis' of these various lists of commandments and value statements. If we shake them all together, can we extract a broad and balanced statement of humanist values for today? I think we can, and our attempt is presented to you in the following pages. It's not the last word on humanist values, but we hope you will find our selection informative, helpful, and inspiring. Why not set up a discussion group on humanist values with this booklet as a guide?

Is Humanism just Christianity minus belief in God?

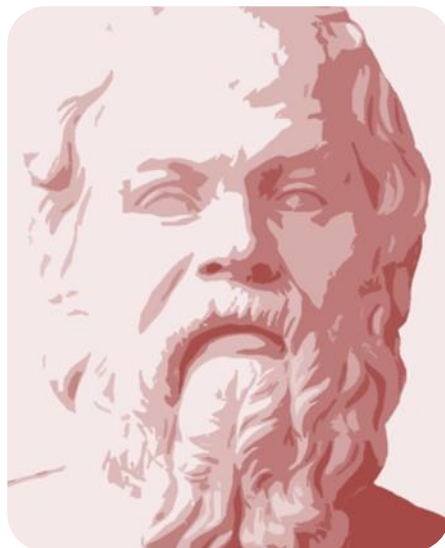
No. The humanist moral tradition is at least 500 years older than Christianity and it differs in some important respects. For example, humanist morality stemming from Socrates suggests that we should aim to live a *good life*, rather than simply *a life of doing good*. Even a bad person can go around doing good works, possibly to make them look good. A good life is more than just altruism, charity, and good works. It is the total impact of your life in terms of the contribution you make to humanity.

Humanism as an antidote to the modern epidemic of pessimism

Humanism has always been a positive and optimistic philosophy, based on the values of the 18th century Enlightenment which included reason, progress, science, human happiness, human rights, and (more controversially) the 'perfectibility of man'.

Humanists today acknowledge that humans are flawed and that Utopian visions of the future can go badly wrong. But while we fully recognise the destructive capabilities of our species, we also celebrate our wonderful achievements in lifting millions of people out of poverty, eliminating diseases such as smallpox, radically reducing child mortality and so on. Our cultural achievements, similarly, have often been awe-inspiring.

Humanism today has the potential to help us maintain our belief in, and optimism about, the human project. We've been around for about 200,000 years and in the last 10,000 years we have progressed from hunter-gatherer groups to today's highly sophisticated and interconnected global ecosystem.



Socrates is the original 'humanist martyr'. He was found guilty of atheism and of corrupting the minds of young people by his habit of asking philosophical questions. A good Socratic question is 'What is a good life?'

But the challenges we face are immense. In some ways we are the victims of our own success. We have become too numerous and we are putting unprecedented pressures on the living planet and other species. We have to learn to live within planetary boundaries if we are to secure a long term future for the generations that come after us.

Humanism is not a cult or a sect. Essentially, it's the worldview of most non-religious people today. Organised Humanism simply exists to give Humanism a voice and to promote the positive value of living a good life in an imperfect world.

HUMANIST VALUES

The 8 Values



CITIZENSHIP: be a well-informed citizen who upholds liberty, justice, equality, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the common good



ENVIRONMENT: live responsibly within the resources of the planet embodying respect and consideration for all living things



KNOWLEDGE: think for yourself and think critically using information, evidence, analysis and evaluation



PERSONAL INTEGRITY: be a person of integrity, honesty, and authenticity whom others can trust



CHALLENGES: cultivate courage, fortitude, resilience, and perseverance in the face of life's difficulties



RELATIONSHIPS: practise love, care, respect, compassion, kindness, benevolence, generosity, forgiveness, tolerance, acceptance and understanding



MEANING AND PURPOSE: contribute your skills, effort and ideas to building a good society in which everyone can flourish



HAPPINESS: enjoy life and take care of your own wellbeing, promoting a healthy lifestyle and a fair work/life balance

These values have been distilled from a meta-analysis of many different humanist value statements. You can find all the source material in the further resources section.

'We won't all come up with the same list of values. But we seem already to have a plausible list of values which many people would accept – kindness, consideration, peace, love, cooperation, honesty, loyalty, fairness, mutual respect and tolerance. The list may even seem obvious. If it does, that is all to the good, for it bears out one of the most basic tenets of humanism – that there are shared human values.' **Richard Norman**, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Kent, and Vice-President of Humanists UK. Quoted in *The Little Book of Humanism* (2020) by Andrew Copson and Alice Roberts.



CITIZENSHIP

Be a well-informed citizen who upholds liberty, justice, equality, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the common good

Rights and responsibilities of being a good citizen

The 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously wrote that in a 'state of nature' human life would be a war of all against all and that human life would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. One of our greatest human achievements is to lift ourselves out of such misery by building societies and states.

There is a long tradition of philosophical thought about how to build the best society. Hobbes himself believed in absolute monarchy whereas John Locke believed that the state must be based on the consent of the people and 'natural rights'.

Humanists are with Locke. We oppose authoritarian states and we believe in democracy. But democracy itself is now under threat from vested interests and the power of the media to shape, and even corrupt, people's opinions. What can ordinary humanists do in the face of seemingly vast forces at play in the world?

Humanists should do their best to be well-informed citizens and to play their full part in democracy. This might involve joining a political party or a pressure group. At the very least, it means turning out to vote when the opportunity is presented, even if we sometimes feel that our vote doesn't count for much. It always counts for something and it means that you have at least fulfilled your basic democratic responsibility.



Humanist Leo Igwe campaigns for human rights in Nigeria

Secularism

One of the distinctive contributions of Humanism is to insist that the state should be secular. Essentially, this means the separation of state and religion. States should not promote religion or oblige its citizens to be religious in any way. The UK still has some way to go in this regard. We still have bishops in the House of Lords and compulsory worship in state schools. Every concession to secularism has to be wrung out of the government. For example, it took 150 years of campaigning for the blasphemy laws to be abolished in England and Wales.

Humanists are in it for the long haul. We pay tribute to the courageous campaigners of previous centuries who sometimes went to prison to secure the basic freedoms we enjoy today. We should do our bit to campaign for the maintenance and extension of these freedoms, both at home and in solidarity with humanists around the world.



ENVIRONMENT

Live responsibly within the resources of the planet embodying respect and consideration for all living things

The pale blue dot we call Earth

One of the greatest images ever captured was 'Earthrise' from the surface of the Moon by the Apollo astronauts. It is believed to have inspired the modern environmental movement.

The environmental movement has coincided, however, with a huge surge in human population and our ability to produce consumer goods which use the world's resources at an ever-increasing rate. We celebrate the fact that developing countries like China and India have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty but at the same time recognising that if everyone is to have the same standard of living we may need several extra planets. Which of course we do not have.

How to save the planet

The alternative course of action is to invest in technology which radically reduces our impact on the planet. One example of this is the 'green revolution' in crop yields so that we use less arable land to feed more people. Another example is the fact that smart phones have replaced numerous bulky consumer products such as cameras, fax machines, record players and so on.

One of the things we need to do is drastically reduce our use of inefficient motor cars. Our future transport mix is probably going to include more walking, cycling, trains, and self-driving electric cars and less polluting forms of travel.



The iconic 'Earthrise' image from the Moon

Global warming

One of our biggest challenges is to reduce the amount of CO₂ going into the atmosphere and oceans. We need an Apollo-scale mission to identify the best energy alternatives and rapidly upscale them. New nuclear technologies may be our best bet.

In 2019 Humanists International published its [Reykjavik Declaration](#) which committed the international humanist movement to 'foster a social and political commitment to urgent action and long-term policymaking to mitigate and prevent climate change'. Every humanist has a part to play in this.

Humanists UK also has a new Climate Action Group which individual humanists can join.

Suggested reading: *Doughnut Economics* by Kate Raworth outlines a system that meets our needs without exhausting the planet.



KNOWLEDGE

Think for yourself and think critically using information, evidence, analysis and evaluation

The democratization of knowledge

Universal education in advanced countries is an achievement of the last two hundred years. For centuries, education was suppressed because of the belief that ordinary people might ‘get ideas above their station’. We owe a debt to early freethinkers and social reformers like Robert Owen for the fact that most of us now go to school, college and university, and we have access to libraries, bookshops, and the vast store of knowledge on the internet.

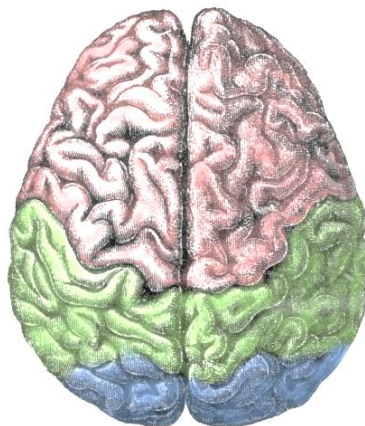
Two types of thinking

We now know, however, that humans think in two different ways. The first way is the kind of thinking that *confirms* our beliefs and the second way is thinking that *challenges* our beliefs. Daniel Kahneman summed it up in the title of his best-selling book ‘Thinking, Fast and Slow’ (2011). Fast thinking is automatic, based on shortcuts, whereas slow thinking is more effortful and deliberative.

We seem to be living through an epidemic of the wrong type of thinking. Millions of people think in tribal ways to defend and promote the beliefs of their tribe and to attack the beliefs of the opposing tribe. We need to stop doing this. Humanists believe that we should think scientifically on the basis of evidence. If the evidence challenges or contradicts our tribal beliefs then we should have the courage to change our mind.

Science and pseudo-science

As well as the epidemic of bad thinking habits millions of people believe in ideas and theories



The human brain

which have no basis in science such as certain alternative medicines and a resurgence in the belief that the Earth is flat. Even intelligent and well-educated people can go along with some of these theories.

Humanists are quite clear that the only way we can gain reliable knowledge about the world is through empirical research and testing. There are no shortcuts to knowledge based on wishful thinking.

It’s no accident that many Patrons of Humanists UK are scientists including Jim Al-Khalili, Alice Roberts, Richard Dawkins, Brian Cox and many others. One of the purposes of a humanist group is to provide opportunities to learn more about science. We also celebrate the life of one of our greatest scientists: Charles Darwin.

Suggested reading – *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman

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PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Be a person of integrity, honesty, and authenticity whom others can trust

“This above all, to thine own self be true” Hamlet

Being ‘true to yourself’ has always been a core humanist value. This is one of the values that distinguishes Humanism from religions which often make *submission to God* the most important value. Humanists do not have a belief in God and therefore personal autonomy and integrity is of paramount importance.

Personal autonomy and authenticity

But what does ‘being true to yourself’ really mean? Humanistic psychologists, such as Carl Rogers, have long known that human beings tend to adopt the values and beliefs of those around them, especially those in authority like parents and teachers. We are intensely social beings and we want to fit in with our social group. Unfortunately, we sometimes find that trying to ‘fit in’ goes against our own personal instincts. This may be to do with religious or political beliefs, sexuality, gender identity, or other values which may clash with the surrounding society. Being true to yourself may then come at a significant personal cost.

You may reach a stage in life when you realise that you have been ‘living a lie’ in some way that is not authentically valid for you. ‘Coming out’ as a different person can be hard but a humanist group can be supportive.



Carl Rogers, a pioneer of humanistic psychology

Is honesty always the best policy?

We can all think of examples when brutal honesty may not be the best policy, such as when your best friend asks for reassurance about their appearance or clothing sense. But in general, we value honesty because we want to live in a society where we can trust one another. No one likes to be lied to, deceived or betrayed and usually, in some way or another, we punish people who have broken our trust. Honesty and integrity, therefore, are basic rules of engagement in human society. Sometimes we are tempted to bend the truth for some short-term advantage but the long-term consequences can be devastating. Honesty is almost always the best policy.



CHALLENGES

Cultivate courage, fortitude, resilience, and perseverance in the face of life's difficulties

It takes courage to be a humanist

One of the reasons human beings have invented gods is in order to give them strength, security, and hope in adversity. Obviously, it's comforting to believe that the creator of the universe is looking out for you. But humanists do not believe in God. Instead, we find strength in ourselves and each other to face life's difficulties.

Self-reliance

Humanistic thinkers since Emerson have praised the value of self-reliance. Humanists should certainly try to cultivate resilience and fortitude in the face of adversity. One way to do this is to recall Nietzsche's slogan: 'What doesn't kill me makes me stronger'. This might seem a bit extreme, but there is evidence to suggest that people can experience 'post-traumatic growth'. So we shouldn't be too afraid to face the difficulties and challenges that come to everyone. Another popular slogan is 'Feel The Fear and Do It Anyway' (title of a 1987 book by Susan Jeffers).

Courage in the face of illness and death

Many people have to live with extremely debilitating conditions and most of us, as we get older, will find that our bodies start to wear out and malfunction. This is the human condition and Humanism does not promise any fanciful escape from it. So how can humanists face such existential threats?



Life is everything

The humanist way is to live life to the full and know that you have lived and 'enjoyed your day in the sun'. The humanist E M Forster said that 'Death destroys a man but the idea of death saves him'. What he meant by this paradoxical statement is that the knowledge of our mortality is what gets us up in the morning to do the work we have to do and pursue the interests and passions we have. If we were immortal beings there would be no incentive to grasp life. Another favourite humanist slogan is *Carpe Diem* which means 'Seize the Day'.

Humanist pastoral care

Humanists UK runs a non-religious pastoral care network to offer help and support to those who need it, whether in hospital, or prison, or other settings and also a network of humanist celebrants to conduct important ceremonies such as funerals and weddings. You can train to become a non-religious pastoral care worker or celebrant.



RELATIONSHIPS

Practise love, care, respect, compassion, kindness, benevolence, generosity, forgiveness, tolerance, acceptance and understanding

All you need is love?

The Beatles, and some religions, claim that all we need to do is love each other and the world will be a wonderful place. The reason we don't is because human beings evolved to compete for resources, the most attractive mates, property and status, and a whole load of other advantages as we play the game of life. We are prone to all manner of destructive emotions and tendencies including jealousy, envy, cruelty, and violence. As apes go, we are somewhere between the sex-crazed bonobo and the violent common chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*). Religions have spent millennia preaching at people to 'love your neighbour as yourself' with limited results. The truth is, we cannot (as yet) reprogram human nature to be all-loving. So what is to be done?

Improving human character

Social reformer Robert Owen believed that human character could be improved through positive education and by improving social conditions. There is certainly some truth in this. If children are socialised in a positive way with firmness and kindness then there is a much greater chance that they will learn these virtuous character traits for themselves. Certainly, we should not assume that there is a sliding scale of virtue depending on where you are in the class structure but good social and economic conditions are conducive to the moral improvement of the human species.



A pre-pandemic humanist social!

A humanist theory of morality

Morality is a social competence. Virtues like fairness, honesty, and politeness are usually enforced by social sanctions and unpleasant emotions like shame and guilt. They are also encouraged by social rewards and pleasant emotions like approval, popularity, reputation and esteem.

If you identify as a humanist then you are implicitly holding yourself to an ideal of moral excellence. We all fail from time to time but we can forgive ourselves and each other and keep aiming at the ideal.

Humanists aim to be good not to please imaginary gods but because it's the best way to live in our human world.

The Golden Rule, 'Treat others as you would like to be treated', is often cited by humanists. It's an ancient formula found in many religions and philosophies.



MEANING AND PURPOSE

Contribute your skills, effort and ideas to building a good society in which everyone can flourish

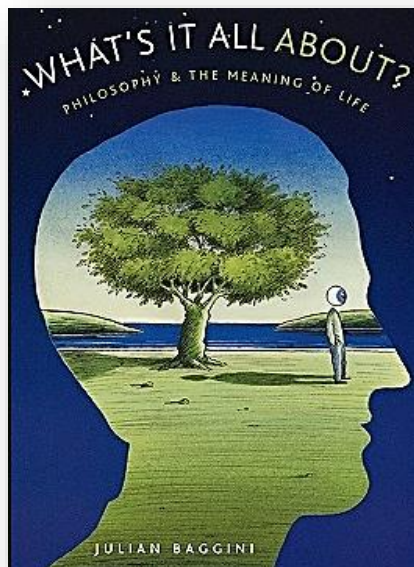
How to live a meaningful life

Some religious people think that if you do not believe in God and life after death then life is 'meaningless'. The humanist response to this is that human life may not have any ultimate cosmic purpose but our individual human lives have meaning and purpose within the ongoing story of humanity.

It's true that some people lose their way and feel that their lives lack meaning. But this is an existential condition or crisis which can be remedied. Most of us find meaning in the work we do, in the relationships we have, in the families we raise, and in the projects we pursue. The great novelist George Eliot believed that we can achieve a kind of immortality by the influence of our good deeds rippling out into 'the growing good of the world'. This is not an egoistic grasping after immortality but rather a recognition of a human responsibility to contribute our lives, skills, and talents to make the world a better place.

The Enlightenment Project

Humanism is an integral part of the Enlightenment Project which started around 300 years ago. It is based on the values of science, reason, progress, freedom of thought and expression, and the possibility of human happiness. Humanists are not naively optimistic about the future but we do believe that humanity has the capacity to solve its problems and improve the life chances of millions, if not billions, of people.



Living for 'Something Bigger' than yourself

One way to find meaning and purpose in life is to live for 'something bigger than yourself'. For example, you may decide to dedicate yourself to a project or a cause which concerns everyone on the planet and which will still be relevant long after your own death.

Humanism is an international movement with groups and organisations on every continent. It is a movement which has been struggling for human enlightenment and emancipation for centuries. By being a humanist, you can be part of this movement and your life can be a link in the chain.



HAPPINESS

Enjoy life and take care of your own wellbeing, promoting a healthy lifestyle and a fair work/life balance

The happy human



The international symbol of Humanism is the 'Happy Human'. This symbol represents Humanism's optimistic approach to life and the belief that we have the potential to live happy and fulfilling lives.

A scientific approach to happiness

Positive psychologists such as Martin Seligman and Sonja Lyubomirsky have been studying happiness scientifically for many years. We now have a good idea of the techniques and practices that promote happier lives. Being happy does not depend on reaching the mythical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It's more like a skill that you can learn.

Sonja Lyubomirsky's happiness-boosting strategies include expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism, practising acts of kindness, nurturing social relationships, developing strategies for coping with adversity, practising forgiveness, savouring life's pleasures, committing to lifelong goals, and taking care of your body. That's quite a long list, but she recommends choosing two or three to work on at any one time.

She also includes 'spirituality'. Humanists do not believe in any 'spiritual' dimension of reality but there's no reason why humanists cannot practise helpful techniques like meditation and mindfulness.



Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor psychology, promotes a scientific approach to happiness

Humanism grew out of the eighteenth century Enlightenment which promoted the 'pursuit of happiness'. Famously, this phrase was included in the American Declaration of Independence. Humanists may no longer talk about the *pursuit* of happiness, as if it's something elusive which has to be chased, but valuing human wellbeing in this life is at the core of what it means to be a humanist.

Some humanist groups have run happiness courses based on scientific findings. We also support initiatives like [Action for Happiness](#). Why not find out more for yourself and help to run a happiness project in your group?



Humanist Values

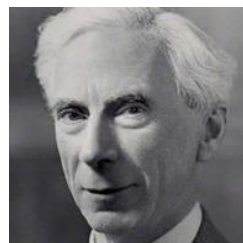
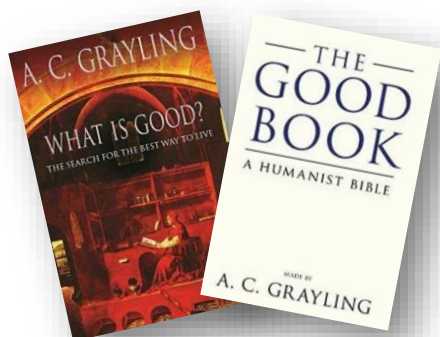
Further Resources

Where do humanist values come from?

We've claimed in this booklet that humanist values are at least 500 years older than Christianity. To go to the source of independent philosophy about morals and ethics you'd have to look at ancient books such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and a collection of Epicurus's works called *On Happiness*.

But you don't have to go back 2½ thousand years for inspiration. Modern freethinkers, atheists, rationalists, and humanists often think about ethics and morality and some of them have suggested humanist versions of the ten commandments. A C Grayling has even compiled a 'Humanist Bible'. It's important to stress however that Humanism is *not* based on commandments or a Bible. These alternative collections are thought experiments designed to stimulate your own thinking.

The values we have highlighted in this booklet have been distilled from ideas suggested by Bertrand Russell, A.C. Grayling, Richard Dawkins, Alain de Botton, Philip Nathan, Humanists UK and the American Humanist Association.



Philosophers ancient and modern have thought about how to live a good life.
Clockwise from top left: Aristotle, A C Grayling, Bertrand Russell, Alain de Botton

A.C. Grayling's 'ten commandments'

Love well
Seek the good in all things
Harm no others
Think for yourself
Take responsibility
Respect nature
Do your utmost
Be informed
Be kind
Be courageous

A.C. Grayling *The Good Book* (2011) The Good 8:11



Humanist Values

Further Resources

Humanists UK values

In all our work, we strive to embody our values by:

- engaging in dialogue and debate rationally, intelligently, and with attention to evidence;
- recognising the dignity of individuals and treating them with fairness and respect;
- respecting and promoting freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;
- cooperating with others for the common good, including with those of different beliefs;
- celebrating human achievement, progress, and potential.

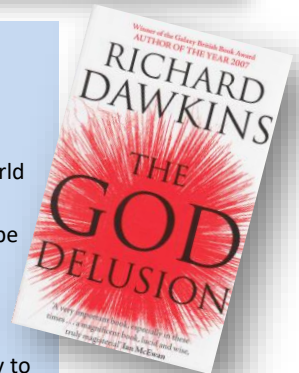


Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK, and Alice Roberts, President of Humanists UK. They have recently collaborated on *The Little Book of Humanism* (2020)

Richard Dawkins' Ten Commandments

1. Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.
2. In all things, strive to cause no harm.
3. Treat your fellow human beings, your fellow living things, and the world in general with love, honesty, faithfulness and respect.
4. Do not overlook evil or shrink from administering justice, but always be ready to forgive wrongdoing freely admitted and honestly regretted.
5. Live life with a sense of joy and wonder.
6. Always seek to be learning something new.
7. Test all things; always check your ideas against the facts, and be ready to discard even a cherished belief if it does not conform to them.
8. Never seek to censor or cut yourself off from dissent; always respect the right of others to disagree with you.
9. Form independent opinions on the basis of your own reason and experience; do not allow yourself to be led blindly by others.
10. Question everything.

Richard Dawkins *The God Delusion* (2006) page 406



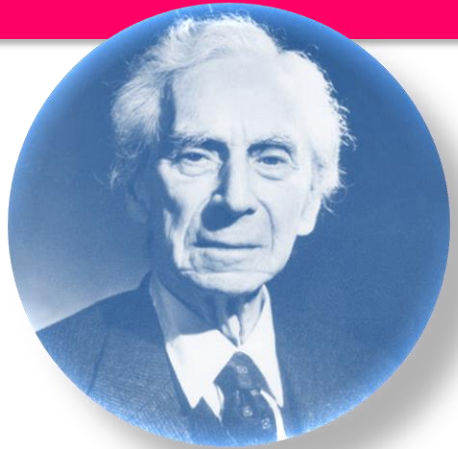


Humanist Values

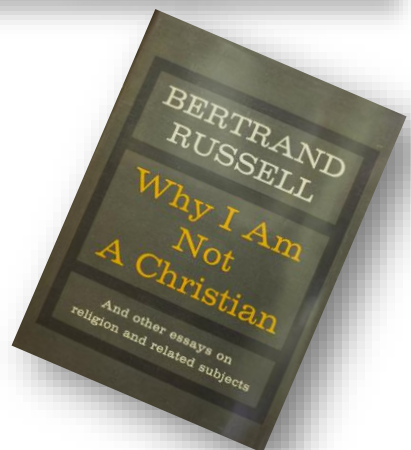
Further Resources

Bertrand Russell's Ten Commandments of Critical Thinking

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worthwhile to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavour to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.



Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was a philosopher, mathematician, campaigner, and humanist. He was imprisoned for his views during the First World War and again in his eighties for civil disobedience in relation to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.





Humanist Values

Further Resources

1. Altruism

"I will help others in need without hoping for rewards."

2. Critical Thinking

"I will practice good judgment by asking questions and thinking for myself."

3. Empathy

"I will consider other people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences."

4. Environmentalism

"I will take care of the Earth and the life on it."

5. Ethical Development

"I will always focus on becoming a better person."

6. Global Awareness

"I will be a good neighbour to the people who share the Earth with me and help make the world a better place for everyone."

7. Humility

"I will be aware of my strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of others."

8. Peace and Social Justice

"I will help people solve problems and handle disagreements in ways that are fair for everyone."

9. Responsibility

"I will be a good person—even when no one is looking—and own the consequences of my actions."

10. Service and Participation

"I will help my community in ways that let me get to know the people I'm helping."



The American Humanist Association's *Ten Commitments*
AHA Center for Education
2019

"The Ten Commitments represents our shared humanistic values and principles that promote a democratic world in which every individual's worth and dignity is respected, nurtured, and supported, and where human freedom and ethical responsibility are natural aspirations for everyone."



Humanist Values

Further Resources



Alain de Botton's Ten Virtues

1. Resilience

The art of keeping going even when things are looking dark; of accepting reversals as normal, of refusing to frighten others with one's own fears and of remembering that human nature is in the end reassuringly tough.

2. Empathy

The capacity to connect imaginatively with the sufferings and unique experiences of another person. The courage to become someone else and look back at oneself with honesty.

3. Patience

We lose our temper because we believe that things should be perfect. We've grown so good in some areas (putting men on the moon, etc), we're ever less able to deal with things that still insist on going wrong, like traffic, government, other people. We should be calmer and more forgiving by getting more realistic about how things actually tend to go.

4. Sacrifice

We're hard-wired to seek our own advantage but also have a miraculous ability, very occasionally, to forego our own satisfactions in the name of someone or something else. We won't ever manage to raise a family, love someone else or save the planet if we don't keep up with the art of sacrifice.

5. Politeness

Politeness has a bad name. We often assume it's about being "fake" (which is meant to be bad) as opposed to "really ourselves" (which is meant to be good). However, given what we're really like deep down, we should spare others too much exposure to our deeper selves. We need to learn "manners", which aren't evil – they are the necessary internal rules of civilisation. Politeness is linked to tolerance, the capacity to live alongside people with whom one will never agree, but at the same time, can't avoid.

6. Humour

Seeing the funny sides of situations and of oneself doesn't sound very serious, but it is integral to wisdom, because it's a sign that one is able to put a benevolent finger on the gap between what we want to happen and what life can actually provide; what we dream of being and what we actually are, what we hope other people will be like and what they are actually like. Like anger, humour springs from disappointment, but it's disappointment optimally channelled. It's one of the best things we can do with our sadness.



Humanist Values

Further Resources

Alain de Botton's Ten Virtues continued...

7. Self-awareness

To know oneself is to try not to blame others for one's troubles and moods; to have a sense of what's going on inside oneself, and what actually belongs to the world.

8. Forgiveness

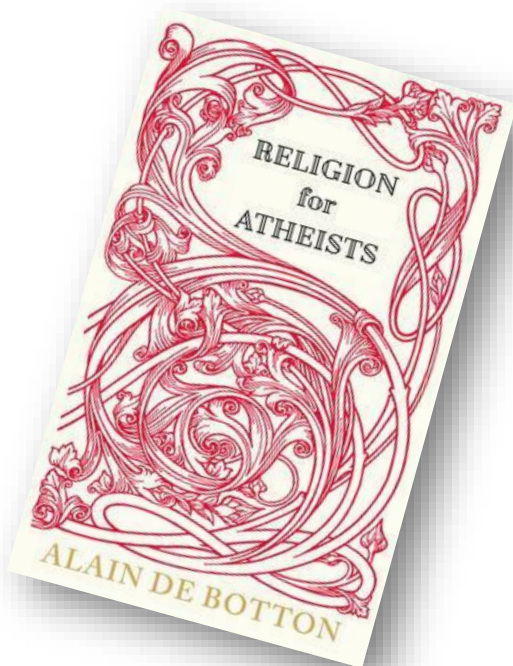
Forgiveness means a long memory of all the times when we wouldn't have got through life without someone cutting us some slack. It's recognising that living with others isn't possible without excusing errors.

9. Hope

The way the world is now is only a pale shadow of what it could one day be. We're still only at the beginning of history. As you get older, despair becomes far easier, almost reflex (whereas in adolescence, it was still cool and adventurous). Pessimism isn't necessarily deep, nor optimism shallow.

10. Confidence

The greatest projects and schemes die for no grander reasons than that we don't dare. Confidence isn't arrogance, it's based on a constant awareness of how short life is and how little we ultimately lose from risking everything.



Religion for Atheists: A non-believer's guide to the uses of religion by Alain de Botton was published in 2012. It argues that while supernatural claims made by religion are false, some aspects of religion are still useful and can be applied in secular life and society.



Humanist Values

Further Resources

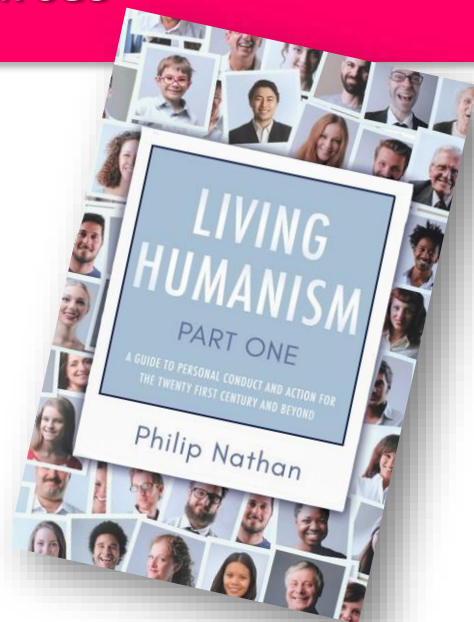
Philip Nathan's two-volume *Living Humanism: A Guide to Personal Conduct and Action for the 21st Century and Beyond* (2018) sets out 52 humanist principles with extensive commentary.

Core Principles

1. Act to support and promote your own well-being and the well-being of all others.
2. Act to reduce and prevent pain and suffering for yourself and for all others.

Additional Fundamental Principles

1. Use rationality, reason, evidence then action, to support the achievement of your more personal goals and the goals of your families, communities, societies and of our broader humanity.
2. Use your passions, emotions and instincts to help achieve your personal well-being and to support the well-being of others.
3. Acknowledge yourself as both an individual and a social being.
4. Treat all people primarily as individuals having equal and individual core value and validity, worthy of receiving equal and individual respect, worthy of receiving equal core individual rights, fairness and justice, and exercising core individual responsibilities.



5. Take responsibility for yourself, for others, for our communities, societies, and for our broader humanity.
6. Have regard to, be mindful of, and take care of the non-human world.
7. Aim to be efficient and effective in supporting your personal well-being and the well-being of others.

More specific principles

1. Act with honesty and integrity in your personal, family, work and public life.
2. Resolve differences and disputes wherever possible through discussion, cooperation, mutual understanding and respect.
3. Never pursue revenge.



Humanist Values

Further Resources

4. Do not use aggressive violence; do your utmost to avoid taking physical action against others; and do your utmost to prevent others taking part in and engaging in aggressive violence.
5. Develop your personal skills, your understanding and knowledge about both yourself and the world around you.
6. Be a participant not just an observer.
7. Work to ensure your independence, freedom and autonomy and support the independence, freedom and autonomy of others.
8. Pursue justice.
9. Be fair to yourself.
10. Pursue the material things and resources which are necessary for your well-being but don't be greedy.
11. While there are general patterns and rules of thumb that may support our actions and decisions, individual challenges and problems often need individual solutions and judgments.
12. Maintain regard and care for others, spend time on caring for others and looking after their well-being, but also focus on pursuit of your own pleasures, enjoyment, fulfilment and happiness.
13. Maintain a sense of scepticism and doubt, where appropriate, about beliefs and statements, but when required, take decisions with commitment and take the necessary action.
14. Aim to achieve in practice.
15. Do not discriminate unfairly against others because they are different in innate features such as sexuality, colour, physical

characteristics, ethnicity and race. Do not discriminate unfairly and unjustly against others for any reason.

16. Live life to the full, enjoying all the pleasures and fulfilment that life can bring.

17. Be prepared to forgive.

Additional and related principles

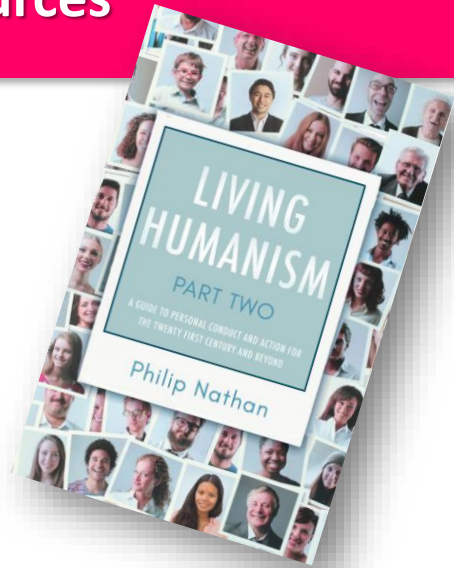
1. Be generous, sharing, kind and helpful but beware of letting others exploit you such that your own well-being and the well-being of others is damaged.
2. Pursue co-operation with others both actively and proactively.
3. Accept that mistakes will be made and some things will go wrong in your efforts to achieve worthwhile goals.
4. Explore, seek adventure, and be open-minded.
5. Master communication.
6. Oppose conformity – Remember it takes all sorts.
7. Nurture and support the full range of positive human potentials.
8. Don't let the past, your upbringing, others, family, community and society around you unnecessarily constrain you, keep you from the future you desire, and keep you from your dreams. Act as far as you can to determine your own future.
9. Don't let others victimise and oppress you, and avoid as far as possible being and seeing yourself as a victim.



Humanist Values

Further Resources

10. As far as possible, be open in pursuit of goals, especially when operating social groups or teams. Wherever possible, avoid aiming to achieve goals in a covert, dishonest and manipulative manner.
11. Be robust in the face of disappointment and failure.
12. Take time to reflect, relax, and rest.
13. Be patient, be prepared for, and, where necessary, plan for the long haul.
14. Be kind not only through your actions but also through your words.
15. Take care of your health, both physical and mental, and support the physical and mental health of others.
16. Always be prepared to learn and be prepared to teach.
17. Be prepared to give and receive help.
18. Support democratic values, openness, inclusion and transparency in decision making.
19. Be as fearless as you can be – avoid being fearful if you can. Be bold in deciding what you wish to achieve and be bold in your efforts to achieve your goals.
20. Be tolerant of those announcing and holding opinions and beliefs which may astound you or which you may find offensive, unless those beliefs promulgate a real and significant physical threat.
21. You can follow the law; you can follow instructions. You can do as you're told or asked. But never obey.
22. Look to the future. Avoid bitterness and harsh regret.



23. Feel free to be determined and stubborn at times.
24. Have realistic expectations.
25. Attempt to see the world from the perspectives of others.
26. Give love and care.

Taking a Humanist perspective which places our human well-being at the centre of our thinking, *Living Humanism* puts forward a range of core and other guiding principles considered central to influencing and deciding on our personal conduct and actions. *Living Humanism* then examines and discusses the application and implementation of these principles in terms of the wide spectrum of situations, questions and issues relevant to our everyday living, focusing on areas such as our support and help for others, friendship, kindness, love, acting with fairness and justice and our relationship with and actions with regard to the non-human world.

Humanistically Speaking



A message from David Brittain

Executive Editor of Humanistically Speaking

We live in an increasingly secular world where the majority of people have taken their leave of religion but not yet discovered or embraced the positive alternative which we call *Humanism*. Most of our fellow citizens may be perfectly content to describe themselves as ‘atheist’, ‘agnostic’, or just ‘non-religious’ and they may hesitate before making the leap into Humanism. This free booklet, ***From Atheism to Humanism: A Compact Guide to 8 Humanist Values*** seeks to facilitate that leap by outlining the positive philosophy of Humanism, drawing on wisdom from many different sources. You may not agree with its contents 100 per cent but that’s one of the strengths of Humanism – there’s a common core of values but plenty of room for disagreement, discussion and debate.

From Atheism to Humanism: A Compact Guide to 8 Humanist Values has been compiled and designed by the *Humanistically Speaking* team. *Humanistically Speaking* is a new and exciting Humanist magazine that was produced primarily for a network of humanist groups in the south of England, however during the Covid lockdown it has expanded across the nation and beyond. It’s open to anyone and free to everyone. It’s aimed at Humanists especially, of course, but it’s also for anyone with an open, enquiring mind.

After a successful first year, we want *Humanistically Speaking* to thrive and we’d like to be able to distribute ***From Atheism to Humanism: A Compact Guide to 8 Humanist Values*** as widely possible at public events, in public places, by giving it to friends, by sending it to other organisations, and by offering it to schools, colleges and universities.

And that’s where you can help. If you like what we do, and want to help promote Humanism and humanist values, then please consider making a donation. Just £10 will go a long way towards printing copies of the *8 Values*. Alternately why not set up a direct debit and help fund us each month. Even £1 from many people would go a long way, but if you can afford more, that’s great too. Additional money will help cover our running costs for *Humanistically Speaking*, and other future ventures yet to be revealed.

You can donate via the Humanistically Speaking account:

Account Name: **Humanistically Speaking**

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If you would like a response and a receipt to show that we received your gift, please let us know by emailing us at the address shown below. Every donation will receive an acknowledgement and a *very big thank you*.

Humanistically Speaking

Okay, so you've discovered you're a Humanist - what's next?

Become a celebrant, a pastoral care worker or schools speaker

Do nothing at all, relax and continue being you

Why not join your nearest Humanist Group and engage with like-minded people? Enjoy educational talks and make new friendships.

Pass this booklet onto a friend and see if they agree?

Become a member of Humanists UK and help support the many campaigns they operate to help bring about a secular society and one that is welcoming of Humanists.

Create your own Humanist Group and help build a fairer, more equal and more compassionate society around you.

Engage in social media on Humanist issues

HumanisticallySpeaking.org