

The here and now of humanists

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Humanists generally do not hold the view that there is any one ready-made purpose in life. We believe that, in the face of a vast indifferent universe, we are thrown back upon our responsibility to create our own purposes, within the possibilities that the world allows. But that is not enough. A chosen purpose to spend our lives robbing banks in order to become incredibly rich would not be consistent with humanist ideals. We believe we have the freedom and the obligation to give meaning and shape to our lives through ethical living. For humanists, morality is not based on external sanctions, but on developing innate human feelings of justice, love, and caring for our fellow humans. Promoting humanist values requires tolerance and compassion and a feeling of oneness with humankind and with the natural world.

So to what things do humanists look forward? We look forward to almost everything, but not to an eternity spent in either heaven or hell. Since we believe this life is all we have, we value the beauty and the many joys that each day brings—coloured leaves in autumn, melting snow in springtime, the blue of lakes and the sky, sunsets, the love of family, the joy of creating things, the beauty and dignity of cats, the playfulness of dogs in the park, flowers, the pleasure of visits with friends, the satisfaction of finding a solution to a problem, the joy of new discoveries—the list is endless. Fortunately, these are values shared by many religious people as well. Every day is a new beginning, full of possibilities, and one never knows what joy might be around the next corner. Let's pack as much good living into each day as we can.

Then what do humanists wish to avoid in making their daily ethical choices? We want to avoid the choices that are bad for humans and bad for society as a whole. These include greediness, injustice, theft, violence, dishonesty, and hatred of our fellow humans. We feel discomfort by seeing others in discomfort, including those who have different world views on progress and on human development. We are saddened by the misfortunes of others. We accept that if we are to make good choices we have the free-will and the responsibility to do so. We also recognize that if we have freedom to make choices, others too will have free-will to choose objectives which will sometimes differ from our own.

Generally, religious believers are concerned that such wide ranging freedom to believe what is meaningful within humanism may lead to a plethora of contradictions in ethical thought. Believers think that if they believe in one God and follow inspired sacred scriptures this will lead adherents to one correct view in finding individual pathways to ethical truths. Nonetheless, there are more than 4000 world religions and many versions

of scriptures and many differences of opinion among and within such a multitude of religious beliefs. Hence, opinions vary on the ethical correctness of issues such as methods of birth control, euthanasia, homosexual partnerships, capital punishment, divorce, and many other ethical issues. Obviously, religious believers have their multitude of differing opinions on a wide range of beliefs and ethical behaviour and upon what it means to follow God's purpose for humankind.

Humanists try to sort through such ethical issues in a caring, thoughtful, and logical manner. What if we are wrong? What if there is a caring, loving, and wise God who has set out his ethical principles for us to follow? What if there really is a hell which awaits us with eternal damnation? Then we are wrong in our views. But if we are caring, concerned people who have tried our best to help our world and our fellow humans, then we will not be any worse off than our religious friends if we discover God exists and He is truly a just, merciful, loving and forgiving God.

In summary, as humanists we try our best to follow ideas that work well for each other in the everyday situations we face here and now.