

WHAT IS HUMANISM?

A brief description of Humanism

Humanism is a philosophy that believes in human effort and ingenuity rather than religion based on divine intervention. Humanists think that this life and this world is all we have. Like everything else that exists we are the product of natural processes. There are no supernatural powers or sacred texts to guide us, so we have to think for ourselves and make our own rules and take responsibility for our own lives and actions and for the world we live in. Ethical decisions should be based on reason and experience and compassion. Everyone has a right to seek happiness and to avoid pain, and the best way to achieve this is to help other people to do the same.

A longer description of Humanism

Those people who find it difficult to accept the basic principles of any religious faith and yet have a sneaking feeling that their own approach to morality gains maturity as their religious faith weakens may well find the West London Humanists a valuable debating forum. It may become their road to enlightenment.

Humanism is a philosophy of life which seeks to establish sound ethical and moral principles by considering human needs and the innate desire of civilized people to live together in a harmonious society. It does so without recourse to systems of thought requiring a belief in non-human guiding principles. Humanists seek a tolerant world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without violence.

In discussing how this philosophy might be applied to the real world, humanists take the view that men and women are an integral part of nature, the result of natural evolutionary change. We recognise that nature is self-existing and we aim to distinguish things as they are from things as people might wish them to be.

Humanists make good use of rational argument and scientific method in working out a sound progressive philosophy. They also recognise the great importance of artistic, emotional, and intuitive elements in the working of the human mind. Thus, all facets of the complex human consciousness are called upon in endeavouring to understand human nature at this stage in its evolution.

At our WLHS monthly meetings we debate a wide variety of subjects where the principles of humanism play an important part in forming our views on nearly all issues. The humanistic approach explores ways of dealing with the down-to-earth problems of an ordered society. We in Britain are fortunate in having evolved a system of law, for example, whose moral impact on society is fairer and less prejudicial than is normally achieved by those systems of law driven by ideological movements or an insistence on adherence to a religious faith.

Human values are derived from human needs and the dogma of religion should play no part in formulating the best possible codes of human behaviour. History has so often seen a total breakdown of society while one faction's request for respect from others simply cannot be met owing to insurmountable sectarian barriers. Humanists subscribe to an open secular society and remain tolerant towards all people who subscribe to sound moral codes.

The IHEU Amsterdam Declaration 2002

A basic definition of Humanist principles was adopted in July 2002 at the Humanist World Congress in Noordwijkerhout (near Amsterdam) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the International Humanist & Ethical Union, and is known as the [IHEU Amsterdam Declaration 2002](#) .

For more information about Humanism, see the [British Humanist Association](#) website