



Non-religious worldviews

RE is not just for the religious, but for all pupils. Most pupils in schools in Britain today do not identify very closely, if at all, with a religious community, and so it is appropriate that RE should include consideration of some of the alternatives to religion which exist in our society. It is clear that it is not only religious people who take ethics seriously; there are various philosophies and approaches to life that have nothing to do with any particular religion, but call followers to lives of love and unselfishness.

These living belief systems can be grouped together as 'non-religious worldviews' or 'ethical life stances'. Their forms are often eclectic, but include everything from rationalist atheism and agnosticism, through post-Marxist accounts of humanity, to postmodern spiritualities or life stances. People who feel at home with such descriptions do not all identify formally with Humanism, but Humanists UK articulate perhaps the most visible and organised non-religious ethical life stance to be seen in the nation's public life.

Humanism

Humanism has a long history, and many great intellectuals from past centuries have influenced the modern Humanist tradition. These figures would include thinkers from classical civilisation such as Epicurus and Seneca, as well as enlightenment philosophers from Thomas Paine through John Stuart Mill to Bertrand Russell. Notable contemporary Humanists in the UK include such public figures as Richard Dawkins, Stephen Fry, A.C. Grayling, Tim Minchin, Phillip Pullman and Polly Toynbee.

Though relatively few Humanists belong to a Humanist organisation (in the 2011 Census just over 15,000 people identified themselves specifically as Humanists), the ideas of Humanism are very influential in the UK today, and many people recognise themselves when they hear Humanism described.

With an approach to life based on humanity and reason, Humanists recognise that moral choices are properly founded on human nature and experience alone. We value the truth, and consider facts as well as feelings in reaching a judgement. Humanists reject the idea of any supernatural agency intervening to help or hinder us. Humanists UK

Humanists are people who:

- believe primarily in humanity
- hold that human nature is a remarkable product of the Universe, but not the product of any divine creation, and that the human race can expect no help from any gods
- place their confidence in the power of human reason, goodwill and science to solve the problems that face us, and reject the power of prayer or worship
- accept the limitations of a lifetime and notice that we live on in the memories of others and in our achievements, but reject all ideas of rebirth, resurrection or eternal life
- when it comes to ethics, believe that their own reasoned sense of goodness and happiness should guide them to decide what is right for themselves and others
- are often concerned for the greatest happiness for the greatest number
- think it is best to make ethical decisions by looking at the individual case, not just by applying a hard-and-fast rule
- have often been active in working for human rights and get involved in a variety of social and ethical issues

Those who identify themselves as Humanist may have special secular welcomes for a new baby, wedding ceremonies based on Humanist ideals and non-religious funerals. They may celebrate festivals in a secular way, whether this means joining in New Year celebrations with relish, or marking United Nations Day.

Ethically, Humanism is often personal and individual, liberal, tolerant and rationally based. Humanists may be in favour of free choice in matters such as euthanasia or divorce, and may emphasise virtues such as truthfulness, generosity, democracy, tolerance, justice and co-operation. Humanists try to put the 'Golden Rule' into action: treat other people as you would like them to treat you.