



I say that I am a humanist, meaning by that, that we should strive as best as we can to do good, to try to help where we can, to compliment other persons wherever possible. By this I mean that we should express an affirmative attitude all the time, to try to improve the situation, if we can, to look at the bright side.

Paul Kurtz

Humanism is a secular, liberal, democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of more humane and just societies through an ethic based on secular values using reason and free inquiry to encourage the flourishing of human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.

Freethought means that opinions should be formed on the basis of logic, reason and empiricism - not authority, tradition, or other dogmas. Individuals should not accept ideas proposed as truth without recourse to knowledge and reason. Freethinkers strive to build their opinions on free and open inquiry. Freethought leads to atheism.

Atheism is the rejection of belief in the existence of deities, because of lack of (empirical and logical) evidence. The *burden of proof* is on the believer to support his or her religious claim with empirical evidence.

Skepticism is a questioning attitude towards knowledge claims. Philosophical skepticism is an overall approach that requires all information to be well supported by evidence. Most scientists are empirical skeptics, who admit the possibility of knowledge based on evidence, but hold that new evidence may always overturn these findings.

Secularism is the principle of separation of government institutions, and the persons mandated to represent the State, from religious institutions and religious dignitaries. *Political secularism* asserts the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and the right to freedom from governmental imposition of religion upon the citizens. *Moral secularism* refers to the view that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be unbiased by religious influence.

A.C. Grayling's Ten Recommendations

1. Love well
2. Seek the good in all things
3. Harm no others
4. Think for yourself
5. Take responsibility
6. Respect nature
7. Do your utmost
8. Be informed
9. Be kind
10. Be courageous

Beyond Religion

Strategies to overcome religion – within the liberal paradigm

Freedom from religion

Prevention of religious indoctrination both in education and parenting. Children should be free from religion.

Political secularism

Separation of religion and state (French model of *laïcité*). No faith-based education.

Moral secularism

Autonomous ethics as a moral Esperanto, e.g. universal subjectivism.

Discouragement of religion

Public policy of discouragement similar to the recent anti-smoking policies.

Criticizing religion

As long as religion has influence on society there is a need for debunking, criticizing & ridiculing religion as is done by e.g. the New Atheists.

Scientific naturalism

The idea that the laws of nature (as opposed to supernatural ones) operate in the universe, and that nothing exists beyond the natural universe or, if it does, it does not affect the natural universe.

Recommended Reading

- Floris van den Berg, *Philosophy for a Better World*
- Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*
- Paul Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism*
- Bill Cooke, *A Wealth of Insights: Humanist Thought since the Enlightenment*
- Bill Cooke, *Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism & Humanism*
- Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*
- Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*
- A.C. Grayling, *Ideas that Matter. A Personal Guide for the 21st century*
- A.C. Grayling, *Towards the Light of Liberty*
- Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*
- Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind*

- Paul Kurtz, *Eupraxsophy. Living without religion*
- Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism*
- Stephen Law, *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction*
- Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*
- Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities The Human Development Approach*
- Massimo Pigliucci, *Nonsense on Stilts: How to Tell Science from Bunk*
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*
- Richard Robinson, *An Atheist's Values*
- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*
- Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*
- George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case against God*
- Nigel Warburton, *Free Speech: A Very Short Introduction*

Some humanist moral stances

Human Rights

Central role for Universal Declaration of Human Rights (0) and the Universal Declaration for the Rights of the Child (12).

Blind spots

Searching for moral blind spots by taking into account the interests of those in worst-off positions.

Knowledge

Searching for truth and (new) knowledge using critical intelligence.

Anti-discrimination

Gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. Humanism entails the social acceptance of homosexuals.

Pro-choice

Legalizing abortion, same sex marriage & voluntary euthanasia.

Freedom of expression

Including the right to criticize (and ridicule) religion. No ideas or ideologies or humans should be exempt from critique and critical investigation.

Liberal democracy

Against dictatorships and authoritarianism. Promoting active participation in government: liberal democratic citizenship.

Against cultural relativism

Cultures aren't all morally equal, even though all humans are. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is morally superior to the Islamic Cairo Declaration of Human Rights (42), in which for example women, nonbelievers, apostates and homosexuals do not have equal rights.

Against paternalism

Promoting individual autonomy.

Opposing non-therapeutic circumcision on children

Including female genital mutilation and circumcision on boys.

Science education

Big history – which includes evolution - should be taught in all schools – not creationism.

Cosmopolitan citizenship

All humans belong to a single community living on a shared planet.

Expanding Moral Circle

To whom should we apply ethics?

Myself (egoism)

My friends & family (extended egoism)

Everyone in my country (nationalism)

All living humans (anthropocentrism/speciesism)

Future generations (extended anthropocentrism)

Nonhuman animals (sentientism)

All living things (biocentrism)

Ecosystems (ecocentrism)

The planet (holism)

The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but,

Can they suffer? (sentientism)

Jeremy Bentham

Towards eco-humanism

We have to share this planet and we should try to make the best of it, for those alive now and for those coming after us.

Earth Charter

The Earth Charter (52) is an expansion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights towards ecocentrism, for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society.

Lifestyle changes

Turning away from consumerism. Striving to live without causing harm to others. Ameliorating suffering through care, empathy and kindness. Becoming an activist, embracing veganism.

Sustainable oceans

Creating large marine reserves, stopping (over)fishing, avoiding pollution like plastic and finding ways to clean the oceans.

Climate change

Dramatically reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, working towards a post-carbon society.

Population control

Control population growth.

Sustainable energy use

Employ sustainable technologies.

Eco-education

Ecology and sustainable development should be central in education worldwide.

Future generations

Taking future generations into our moral circle.

Biodiversity

Acknowledging the importance of biodiversity, for example by creating large worldwide reserves all over the planet.

Wilderness preservation

In wildness is the preservation of the world.
H. D. Thoreau

Beyond speciesism

Equal consideration of interests, including non-human animals in our moral circle. Working towards animal rights, especially for great apes & dolphins.

Sustainable farming

A revolution in farming practices: organic, sustainable, animal friendly farming, e.g. permaculture. Getting rid of intensive animal farming world wide.

Sustainable steady state economy

Replacing the growth-obsessed economy with a stable size economy, which features a stable population and consumption that remains at or below carrying capacity.

Environmental justice

Reflecting on the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.