An Introduction To Humanist Values And Actions

A discussion document produced by

North East Humanists

Background

Stimulated by the a bold attempt in the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 to capture the essence of Humanism, members of North East Humanists formed understanding of Humanistic ideas in 2004. These ideas will constantly develop and evolve.

The Amsterdam Declaration has clearly met a need among humanists for a succinct statement of basic tenets. However, it seemed to the members of the working party that a broader approach could be useful which included observations about where the values and actions come from that underpin Humanist thinking.

The working party, therefore, set out to work on the following objectives:

1. To provide an introduction to a range of humanist thinking for those enquiring about the nature of Humanism
2. To provide a series of assumptions against which individual Humanists may compare their own values and actions

The outcome is in two parts:

1. An introductory statement about Humanistic values and actions
2. Specific Humanistic values and associated actions

It is a part of the essence of Humanism that it has "no unalterable core of laid-down beliefs or orthodox expressions" within its values. Humanism accepts "reality" not "belief". Humanists see this as a progressive and evolving project where content may be added to and modified from time to time in response to criticisms and suggestions made by both Humanists and non-Humanists.

Suggestions on what follows are invited to provide with particular reference to:

- Extent to which the work is helpful/useful in thinking about Humanist values and actions
- Clarity of presentation
- Any suggested modification of any item, its content or wording
- Any suggested additional values, actions, etc.,
- Suggestions must be evidence backed, not opinions or comments that are unsubstantiated

Please contact NEH for further information.

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Basic assumptions

The values and actions that Humanists are concerned with relate to human nature, the nature of society and the meaning of life. The position taken by the working party is that, where there is a choice of how to behave, the actions of an individual are in large part dictated by a Humanists values, that these values arise out of a life experiences and knowledge attained by the individual and not belief.

The following statements are generalisations, nearly all of which require more space to validate them than is appropriate here. Our aim is to paint a broad picture of where we are coming from in compiling our suggested lists of Humanist values and actions.

In its simplest form the sequence is:

Common human needs (nature) + experience (nurture) → accepting reality → values → actions

Human needs and experience

Humans are born with the genetic potential for the unfolding of a range of needs. Many needs, such as for food and comfort, are manifested at birth; other needs, such as for autonomy and achievement, emerge a little later in childhood. Inborn needs stay with the individual throughout life but evolve in their form during each life-stage through to old age.

The manner in which these needs come to be satisfied, or not, is dependent on the physical and social environment and the degree to which it facilitates or inhibits personal growth, (e.g., with regard to the kind, quantity, and quality of the food received, the kind of care given, whether living is harsh or easy, the opportunities for self-expression and self-fulfilment). Beginning in early childhood, according to how his or her needs are met, alongside common human needs (nature) and experiences (nurture) that develop the individual through experience of life and contact with others which is gradually organised into a coherent whole by the acceptance of reality, values and actions.

With regard to the Values and Actions set out below:

- They are thought likely to be held by many humanists, but it is recognised that not all humanists will agree straight away from new ideas and may take time with discussions too review all the alternatives to identify the most progressive direction.

- There is no attempt to establish an "orthodoxy within Humanism", as per the following information, this is defined through research and evidence based reasoning, facts not conjecture, which will be modified as new understandings and alternative ideas emerge that have been validated with evidence and/or peer-review recognised journals.

Actions

As noted, above, values may be seen as statements of policy, i.e., the principles governing action across a variety of situations. Actual ‘right behaviour’ depends on the totality of the circumstances applying at the time. Therefore, the statements in the ‘Actions’ column are intended to be indicative only and are just a few of the actions that could be identified as having a Humanist base.
Values

Values are preferences for particular forms of behaviour and are the principles by which we conduct our lives. By the time adulthood is reached we have acquired a hierarchy of values from the mundane or not very important to the highest and most significant and, to which, some individuals might give up their life to preserving, such as freedom of speech. Within this hierarchy we will have political, economic, social, aesthetic and personal values, with the encroachment of religion (which currently has involvement in the hierarchy due too historical privilege and NOT bringing anything of historical or evidence based reasoning value to the hierarchy)

For example, Humanists see human beings are basically self-centred and untrustworthy. Humanist values are likely to include protecting ourselves from exploitation. Values do not exist in isolation from each other but form a values system, that is, Humanists hold clusters of values which are integrated together and in an intimate relationship of how we function in society by accepting reality

Values are an integral part of personality; they are rooted in the needs system of the individual and are embedded in the experiences which the individual has that give meaning and coherence to a Humanists life and which sustain a Humanists sense of identity. Values, Actions and Accepting Reality are dynamic, that is, a change in one area has a knock-on effect on other areas. For those that still try and bring Belief and Value together. There is an unguided tenacity with which people hold on to Beliefs, due too the fear of the unknown and that a change in one sphere may invalidate all of there Beliefs which will give there sense of little control in their lives. For those that have Values, Actions and Accepting Reality, fear resides in the brain and though experience, training and the addition of knowledge, fear disappears and control can occur. Thus, statements of value in themselves may have little meaning without knowledge of human needs (nature), experience (nurture) and the attitudes of those who propound the value. This value itself can be externally effected by beliefs.

With regard to the values set out below:

- Humanists are not suggesting that fresh values have been discovered. Most of the values identified are familiar, Humanists try too define these values from society

- The number of values that someone has, relates too society and the democratic ideal. It is incorrect too assume that values relate to belief, due too a review of all religious text has found very little in Values that can be transposed too our current society. Therefore, the Actions of all Humanists relate too the Values from knowledge gained, NOT an impediment by the constraints of belief and religious ideology (e.g. the need to pray for guidance, considerations of punishment and reward in the next life, or by the requirement to follow edicts set out in ancient manuscripts or obtained from supposed divine revelation)

- These values are ideals from common human needs (nature) and experiences (nurture). Their practical application is not always so clear-cut as the wording may suggest
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<tr>
<th><strong>Humanist Assumptions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Humanists Value</strong></th>
<th><strong>Compatible Humanist Actions</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>1. There is no discernible purpose to the universe.</td>
<td>1. and 2. The spirit of enquiry that seeks to explain the nature of the universe and of the diversity of life on earth.</td>
<td>1. The pursuit of knowledge which furthers our understanding of the nature of the physical universe</td>
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<td>2. Life forms on earth have evolved over billions of years. As for the universe as a whole, there is no discernible purpose in this evolutionary process, nor plan or prescribed goal for humankind.</td>
<td>2. The construction of our own purposes and goals as in 5, below.</td>
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<td>3. Irrational explanations for natural phenomena such as, in earlier times, the attribution of floods, famine, and disease, to supernatural intervention, arise in part from the need of individuals to reduce uncertainty in their lives. Such explanations impede the development of a common understanding of the human condition and diminish our ability to deal cooperatively with the causes and consequences of natural events.</td>
<td>3. Explanations of human behaviour and of natural phenomena based in reason and on scientifically verifiable evidence. In the absence of such evidence, the acceptance of the simplest and the most likely explanation free from superstition, ideology or religious dogma. An openness to new knowledge and the acceptance of uncertainty.</td>
<td>3. To continually modify our Values and Actions in the light of new knowledge. The rejection of, and opposition to, religious fables such as that of the Creation, and spurious concepts such as “Intelligent Design”. The encouragement of free-thinking.</td>
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<td>4. There is no evidence of an afterlife, and no supernatural agency to whom we can turn for instruction, confirmation, validation, justice, comfort, or support. Feelings of awe at the complexity of the Universe, admiration for the beauty of natural phenomena, and deeply satisfying emotions in personal relationships, are not evidence of the existence of a deity any more than are the experiences of pain and despair.</td>
<td>4. The acceptance that the solutions to human problems lie in the imagination and actions of humans alone.</td>
<td>4. To behave with the recognition that we are responsible for our own destiny. To make the best of our life now rather than preparing for some imagined future existence.</td>
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### Humanist Assumptions

5. Taken with 6., below: The proper concern of humans is with the well-being of the whole of humankind.

6. The future of the human race rests on the recognition by its members of the interdependence of the humankind and its ecological environment.

7. Humans are born with common needs, such as for food, shelter, love, and creativity. However, both within and between societies there can be wide individual differences in how people learn to satisfy their needs and values through the actions they take.

### Humanists Value

5. Self-reliance and independence of thought within the recognition of the ultimate interdependence of humanity. Concern for the well-being of the whole of humankind. Compassion and concern for all humans who, in varying degrees, are deprived of the opportunity for self-fulfilment.


7. An approach which seeks to understand the values of others.

### Compatible Humanist Actions

5. The promotion of ethical scientific research which has the potential for improving the well-being of the human race. Support for aid without religious or ideological strings to help poorer countries improve the ability to meet their own needs. Support for, e.g., all measures to improve education and health care. Support for actions which enhance the living of those who, in varying degrees are deprived of the opportunity for full self-development. In relation to the Third World, opposition, for example, to a crude market-forces approach to the provision of essential services, to economic exploitation, and to pollution by the toxic waste of richer nations.

6. To inform everything we do with care and consideration for humanity, the physical environment, and the natural world. Support for behaviour and laws which promote global and local sustainability and the conservation of scarce natural resources. Support for all humane measures which are intended to reduce the expansion of the world population.

7. Except where secular democratic values are threatened. To show tolerance to differences and opinions and too use these constructively by evaluating them with evidence, reasoning and consensus. Nurture and develop freedom of speech, thought, and action, consistent with the safety and well-being of others. Work in cooperation with those organisations and institutions in those areas of their activity which coincide with Humanist values.
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<td>8. Although conflicts of interest are an endemic feature of human nature, most humans do not manage conflict well. Conflict frequently leads to aggressive behaviour which, though sometimes unavoidable, is rarely an ideal solution. However, properly managed, conflict is a force for new ideas, growth and constructive change.</td>
<td><strong>8.</strong> A co-operative and problem solving approach to differences of interest.</td>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Support for the solving of person to person, societal, and international conflicts and problems by negotiation rather than by power play or the use of physical or psychological force. The preference for reasoned argument as opposed to dogmatic assertion.</td>
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<td>9. Individuals acquire their moral values initially from the groups and society that they grow up in. Moral or ethical codes arise in part from the need of individuals and groups to co-operate if they are to survive, and in part from the attempts of each group or society to regulate behaviour which is thought to be threatening if given free rein. It is probable that there are common human moral and ethical values but the understanding of what constitutes moral and ethical behaviour may vary considerably from society to society and vary within the same society from time to time. Humanist ethics fit well with the democratic rights and values outlined in 11, below.</td>
<td><strong>9.</strong> An approach to morals and ethics which takes account of the complexities of modern living and has as its starting point that moral and ethical behaviour is that which, except in self-defence, does no harm to the well-being of others. In situations of moral dilemma, the choosing of solutions which do least harm to the participants.</td>
<td><strong>9.</strong> To continually check, and if necessary challenge, traditional values. To promote, and practise personally, the highest standards of individual behaviour and communal care. To resist all attempts to impose a morality on society based on archaic injunctions or ideological rules. To oppose bigotry, intolerance, and prejudice, wherever it is found.</td>
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<td>10. Humans are capable of acts of the highest self-sacrifice and altruism but also, individually and collectively, of acts of great cruelty and of disregard for the interests of others. The causes of doing harm to others are multiple and require multiple responses.</td>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Social attitudes which militate against the exploitation, or physical or psychological abuse, of humans by humans. A society which educates its members in tolerant, co-operative living.</td>
<td><strong>10.</strong> The urging of politicians to create structures which minimise the opportunities for acting with brutality or harassment. Support for the United Nations and for voluntary organisations that seek to help people such as e.g. Amnesty International, The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Urging the importance of international agreements which seek to prevent state-sponsored physical and mental abuse. Support for the Campaign Against Arms Trade. The offering of moral support to Humanists living under corrupt regimes.</td>
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<td>11. There are no natural or absolute rights. As with morals and ethics, the interpretation of rights differs from society to society and in the same society from time to time. The rights which, if adopted would lead to a just and healthy society are rooted in the democratic ideal, i.e., that all members of a society should be treated as equals irrespective of race, gender, ability, or disability. Rights and duties are co-relative. Those who enjoy rights have a duty to uphold the same rights for others.</td>
<td>11 Impartiality towards, and equal treatment of, individuals and groups whatever their Views and Actions, and if they have had beliefs. The separation of society and government from religion. Laws created and old Laws updated based on reason, logic, clarity, emotional maturity, critical analysis, Honesty, Dissent, Transparency, Inquiry, Debate, Enquiry, Education and Civility too prevent the encroachment of theological views.</td>
<td>11. To protect and promote the rights conferred on each other by members of a democratic society and which include those of: - equality before the law, - liberty, - free association, - freedom of speech, - a livelihood, - participation in choice of government, - equality of education free from indoctrination, and - equality of health care. To urge the development of social, economic and political systems capable of delivering the above rights. To urge equal representation with religious bodies wherever such bodies are involved in social policy making To oppose those who would seek to impose their own creeds on others, including inappropriate forms of democracy. To support the efforts of Oxfam and other NGOs to bring about a genuine reform of international trade which could lift millions of people in developing countries out of poverty.</td>
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<td>12. Many sentient beings, especially the higher primates, experience fear, pain, frustration, depression, and the need for freedom (autonomy) in much the same way as humans.</td>
<td>12. A humane approach to all actions involving non-human sentient beings.</td>
<td>12. Urging freedom for animals from physical and psychological abuse. Support for organisations which are concerned with the welfare of animals. Opposition to factory farming and to other forms of confining animals in unnatural and stressful conditions such as limited space. Urging the legal requirement that the killing of animals for food should be done in the most humane way possible, following reason, logic and clarity with evidence from accredited journals. By showing respect for the environmental needs of animals and, where possible, the protection of their habitat. Following the most Humane way Cultural heritages, attitudes, creeds, views of the occult and orthodox religions have no relevance and showed be faded out of society due too conflicts in relation to evidence.</td>
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<td>13. The arts, in all their forms, and the development and exercise of physical skills meets the innate need in human nature for creativity and self-expression. They are a major source of pleasure. In plain or symbolic form, the arts express human desires and needs, triumphs, sorrows, the universal problems of living, and explore the essence of being human.</td>
<td>13. The creative and artistic potential of human nature. The capacity of the arts, literature, and recreational activities for expanding perceptions, for increasing the awareness of self, and for illuminating the human condition. All those circumstances that enable humans to be free to experience the physical and mental joys of living.</td>
<td>13. Working to nurture creative and artistic expression. Encouraging the provision of opportunities and facilities for the development of physical skills and for the enjoyment of sport.</td>
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<td>14. There is a deep need in humans for opportunities for meeting with others of like-minded belief, for rites of passage, for communal celebrations of happy events, for opportunities for collective grieving following natural or other disasters, and for ceremonies and gatherings which offer comfort and support for the bereaved.</td>
<td>14. The marking of happy, sad, and life-stage, events in ceremonies or gatherings free from religion.</td>
<td>14. To make better known the Humanistic alternatives to religious ceremonies. Again, to urge Humanist representation at all ceremonial occasions where there are customarily representatives from religious groups.</td>
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