



an anthology of 35 articles by 15 humanists ✨ EDITED BY GARY BAUSLAUGH

Voices of Humanism



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INTRODUCTION

What is humanism? Is it only about contesting the beliefs of the religious, as so often it may seem?

On the contrary, humanism is a multidimensional worldview that entails a deep respect for the seemingly conflicting, but actually complementary, ideas of personal autonomy and commitment to community. Personal autonomy, and the freedom of thought it entails, is not the enemy of civilized and respectful human relationships; rather, it is the means by which we can overcome the ignorance and prejudice that are so corrosive to such relationships. Humanists believe that independence of thought, not dictated or directed by any arbitrary authority, can best lead to the rationality and justice that are at the heart of building more tolerant and compassionate human communities.

We are all autonomous individuals but, as philosopher Joseph Tussman writes in the opening essay in this collection, we are not independent of those who live around us. We cannot simply be unbridled individualists, free of obligations to community, unconcerned about being our brother's or our sister's keeper. Of such people Tussman writes:

They have forgotten that we did not create, nourish, sustain or develop ourselves; that we did not invent our mother tongue and the mind or consciousness so dependent on it; nor the arts and skills embodied in the habits that constitute our character and culture ... Each of us is an individual person but we are all group generated, group shaped, group sustained, group dependent.

Following from these two core beliefs — personal autonomy and allegiance to community — humanism asserts a number of positive and life-affirming ideas. In 1952 the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), with 90 member organizations from around the world, formulated a statement describing in some detail the full meaning of humanism in the modern world. At the 50th anniversary of the organization in Amsterdam in 2002 the statement was reformulated, with seven fundamental principles, as reprinted here:



1 — *Humanism is ethical.* It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.

2 — *Humanism is rational.* It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends.

3 — *Humanism supports democracy and human rights.* Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.

4 — *Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.* Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognizes our dependence on

and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is undogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.

5 — *Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion.* The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognizes that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.

6 — *Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination and recognizes the transforming power of art.* Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfillment.

7 — *Humanism is a life stance aiming at the maximum possible fulfillment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times.* Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.



How does a humanist's perspective influence thinking about social issues? *Voices of Humanism* gives some answers to this question by providing commentaries by humanists on a wide range of issues of human importance. These essays show how humanistic thinking leads to rational, thoughtful, evidence-based and sometimes even humorous approaches to social issues — not to say that humanists are the only people in society doing this, but to show that they, with their particular beliefs, are in the vanguard of progressive thinking.

What does a humanist have to say about morality or education or politics or metaphorical expression? We find that their views on such topics are far from being monolithic: as expressed in this book, they are varied and sometimes conflicting. The complex difficulties of building a better human society, along with the idea of freedom of thought that

is prized by all humanists, ensures that many different perspectives on social issues will exist in the humanist movement. What these perspectives have in common is not uniformity in conclusions but consistency in approach; all are infused with the reason and compassion that lies at the heart of humanism.

Most of these essays were originally published in the Canadian magazine *Humanist Perspectives* during the five years (2003 to 2008) when I was Editor, and Emrys Miller (of Rocketday Arts) was the Designer. The essays, chosen to explore the seven fundamentals of humanism as expressed by the IHEU, show how humanistic thinking can help lead us toward a more rational, just and compassionate world.

Thank you for joining us on this exploration. 🌸

Gary Bauslaugh, Editor