

Windsor Humanist Group

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Humanism

Talk by David Pollock

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HEADLINES

The British Humanist Association is making the news a lot - look at these recent headlines - but what is Humanism?

One point about humanists is that they are not religious - but that is not so remarkable these days.

CENSUS

Even the very conservative Census in 2011 produced a huge increase in the “No religion” group - up from 14% to 25% in 2001 - and drop in the Christian group, from 72% to under 60%.

BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES 1

And the more realistic British Social Attitudes survey has just produced a 30-year survey which confirms that people are becoming less and less religious -

but note that the C of E is the main victim, while the RCs, other Christians and other religions stay roughly unchanged.

BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES 2

Interestingly they find that it is much less a matter of individual people losing religion: instead, each generation is less religious than its elders.

VOAS

This is borne out by research by David Voas, Professor of Population Studies at the Univ. of Essex, into the correlation between the beliefs of adults and their parents' religion. He finds that about 7% make a personal choice of religion - but of the rest when both parents are religious under half their adult children are religious; with one parent religious, 24% are religious, with neither, none.

As he puts it, the half-life of religion is one generation.

MORI POLL

A MORI poll commissioned by the BHA back in 2006 asked people three central questions about life, morality and understanding the universe. They had to choose from lists of 3 or 4 possible answers.

36% chose only 'humanist' answers, and only 13% chose non-humanist answers to all three questions.

So about one in three people are living as humanists - even though the great majority of them probably would never call themselves humanists or even know the word.

So let me at length turn to the subject of Humanism. What is this Humanism that people can live without knowing its name?

And the first question is:
what **sort of thing** is Humanism?

HUMANISM

A world-view or **lifestance** - a word coined in 1970s by the humanist Harry Stopes-Roe -
In German, Weltanschauung

Lifestances can be religious or non-religious
- or both insofar as there is a grey area in between.

They express fundamental beliefs about what are sometimes called Ultimate Questions - about Life, the Universe and Everything.

Different lifestances assert different **facts** about the universe and how it came to be

- they may talk of the Big Bang or they may posit elephants standing on the back of tortoises
- and they assert different relationships between mankind and the universe - with or without any god or gods

and then they **link these factual claims with moral teachings** derived from the facts as they see them.

This combination is invariable: all lifestances - religious or not - combine beliefs about **what is** with linked values about **how things should be** how we should behave.

LIFESTANCES

So, religions do not make up the whole spectrum of ultimate beliefs about life - lifestances

EQUALITY ACT

And lifestances have the same status in law and in human rights whether religious or not - in fact all the relevant laws and international human rights treaties talk about 'religion or belief', which includes non-religious beliefs like Humanism.

Turning then to the Humanist lifestance itself: the first thing to observe is that:

HUMANISM IS NOT AN -ISM - 1

Humanism is not an "-ism" in the sense of a body of more or less unquestionable doctrine:

You don't 'convert' to Humanism and then have to take the rough with the smooth.

So it is different from most - maybe all - religions.

HUMANISM IS NOT AN -ISM - 2

it has no sacred texts or source book of unquestionable rules or doctrine

SLIDE no founding figure such as Jesus or Mohammed

SLIDE no liturgy or prescribed rituals or ceremonies

SLIDE no buildings for worship or meditation

SLIDE no creed, no prayers, no hymns

SLIDE no hierarchy or structure of authority

A RANGE OF BELIEFS AND VALUES

Instead, Humanism is a label for a certain range of beliefs and values.

HUMANIST?

To the extent that you do or do not share these beliefs and attitudes, so you may be more or less inclined to call yourself a humanist.

They are a set of beliefs and values which together constitute a view of the world

- a philosophy by which many people live their lives

There is much diversity in Humanism but there is in fact a core minimum, even if my formulation is only one of many ways of articulating Humanism.

BELIEFS AND VALUES

I'm going to deal with Humanism's core beliefs and values under these heads.

If you imagine this as a Venn diagram, Humanism lies in the overlap of these aspects.

Lots of people who are not humanists will share some of these values - many of them religious people. It is the **combination** that makes up Humanism.

But before I go into detail, let me meet one possible criticism – namely, that this makes Humanism just a ragbag of ideas with no real justification for having a name and identity.

The answer to this is that

the COHERENCE and
the RECURRENCE through history
of this combination of beliefs and values justify seeing
Humanism as a unity, as a valid concept.

Coherence - because all the parts of the humanist
lifestance hold together and support each other, as I
hope you will see.

Recurrence - because, though the name Humanism is
very recent – about 100 years old in this sense -
there is in fact a long tradition - older than any of the
main world religions - of the non-religious philosophy of
life that we now call Humanism.

The tradition has had breaks
(for example, in Europe during the early mediaeval time
when the Roman Catholic church was all-powerful)

but it has always been resumed,
because it is a philosophy inherent in the very fact of
human existence in communities.

So, let me turn to our beliefs.

NATURALISM 1

Religions have in common
a belief in a hidden realm of existence -
a transcendental realm.

Most posit a god or sometimes many gods.
Even those that have no gods -
for example, classical Buddhism and Jainism -
believe in a hidden, celestial realm of existence to
which their followers aspire.

But our beliefs are naturalistic.

We believe that the universe can be explained by
natural laws
many of which we have already discovered
and the rest of which are discoverable - at least in
principle.

The only reality is what we can detect directly or
indirectly through our senses - can see, hear, touch and
so on.

NATURALISM 2

We deny that there is a 'second layer' to existence - of gods and ghosts, spirits of the place

We see claims made without evidence as speculation, and religious claims as unsupported by enough evidence to bring them anywhere near credibility. (Often indeed they literally make no sense when you try to analyse them.)

Our only route to sure and certain (or rather eternally unsure) knowledge is through an assumption of naturalism.

ONLY ONE LIFE

It follows that we have no belief in an afterlife.

Death is the end and we do not survive it.

Here again we are different from the religions: Almost all religions believe in a continued existence after this life - and sometimes they believe in an existence before it.

That afterlife is invariably linked to the way one lives in this life -

HANS MEMLING LAST JUDGEMENT

the imagery of the Christian Last Judgement terrified Christians until recently
- indeed, it still does terrify some today.

Our belief is much more benign:

Death is the end.

This is buttressed by modern science - by chemistry & biology -
what we are resides in our brains, and death is the end of the electro-chemical impulses that make us work and define us.

Even before bodily death, brain damage by injury can change our personalities and dementia can rob us entirely of personality.

But our belief is not recent -
it is an old idea, supported by modern science.

Ancient philosophers already had a concept of death as the end of personal existence: they saw that the mind grows with the body, tied to physical being, and that nothing is permanent or eternal.

EPICURUS

Epicurus in the 3rd century BCE believed that if there were gods they had no interest in mankind. His attitude to death was simple:

‘...death is nothing to us. All good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation.’

- Epicurus 342-270 BCE

LUCRETIUS

His follower the Roman Lucretius wrote a poem in several books called *On the Nature of Things*.

‘You have nothing to fear in death. Someone who no longer exists cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who is not born.’

Lucretius (95-55 BCE) also wrote:

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum -
(‘So strongly can religion persuade people to do evil.’)

- a similar thought to the modern observation that normally good men do good things and bad men do bad things: it takes religion (or more properly an ideology of some kind) to make good men do bad things.

MARCUS AURELIUS

Marcus Aurelius, the emperor philosopher was equally, well, philosophical:

A little while and you will be nobody nowhere, nor will anything which you now see exist, nor any of those now alive. Nature’s law is that all things change and turn, and pass away, so that in due course, different things may be.’

- Marcus Aurelius 121-180

This is a response that is popular with some people today as is seen e.g. in eco burials - company publicity

says 'be buried in a beautiful bluebell wood and become part of nature again ' - a humanistic response.

SAMUEL BUTLER

the Victorian novelist (*Erewhon* and *The Way of All Flesh*) and thinker – provides another humanist response

- you live on in a legacy to those who knew you, in your achievements
- like ripples on a pond long after the stone has sunk.

'To die completely, a person must not only forget but be forgotten, and he who is not forgotten is not dead.'

- Samuel Butler 1835-1902

PHRENOLOGY HEAD

Another key belief held by Humanists is that it is part of human nature that we are moral creatures

- not that we are necessarily good - moral in that sense
- because we are not -

but that we all have the capacity to think in moral terms and inevitably do so
- with the exception of a few psychopaths and severely autistic people, that is.

That we have ideas of things being right or wrong is part of human nature.

Care is needed to understand this.

It is in strong contrast with traditional religious views that having no religion means having no morals – that moral law is God's law

Of course, the idea that moral law simply is God's law is a logical nonsense - it robs morality of any moral content.

The nonsense was pointed out 2,400 years ago by Plato in his dialogue called the Euthyphro.

You will remember that in Plato Socrates asks Euthyphro "Is an action good because God commands it is or does God command it because it is good?"

Euthyphro's dilemma is that if it is good because God says it is, then if God tells us, say, to slaughter our enemies, women, children and all, as he often does in the Old Testament, then merciless slaughter is morally good - which is not attractive.

Alternatively, if God commands only things that are good, then goodness is independent of God and God is redundant.

What we are saying is that biology and culture have created our moral sense.

There are all sorts of pro-social behaviours - altruism, cooperation - that are necessary for living together with others of your own species - and this applies to humans pre-eminently.

These behaviours are an evolved mechanism shared by all human beings.

Humans have lived as social animals since millions of years before we were even human, and all social animals have rules - patterns - of behaviour that enable them to live harmoniously and productively together.

If they had not had such rules, they would not have survived.

We had such rules, and we survived.

When we acquired language and an ability for abstract thought, we refined these unwritten rules into extensive moral philosophy.

Our instincts are the basis on which the concept of morality is built - but we are not naturally (exclusively) good -

some instincts are aggressive or selfish - some are group-focussed, which can seem hostile to outsiders.

Human nature is indeed almost infinitely plastic - as history has shown -

and with the wrong education and experience - formation, if you like - people can adopt very anti-social behaviours and feel them to be not only acceptable but morally necessary.

So, our current moral views are massively redesigned and built on by culture but at root reside in human nature, hard-wired into us.

REASON

Now let me move on to our values. One key humanist value is the high importance we set on truth and on rational thinking as the only proven route to secure (-ish) knowledge about the facts of the universe..

That seems obvious to most of us - but not to 'New Age' people who accept unthinkingly nonsense about the healing powers of crystals, about feng shui, or astrology -

or to Prince Charles and all those who believe in alternative medicine such as homeopathy and chiropractic whose practitioners refuse to test it in controlled trials.

Why is it called alternative? Because if it was proven and worked it would be incorporated in regular medicine.

Nor is it obvious to the orthodox religious who are inclined to give answers that are beautiful or comforting, even if they are doubtful how true they are, or will rely on an unquestionable dogma in the face of evidence that it is plainly false.

Often critics of the so-called New Atheism reject its rational critique of religion by saying that it rests on a view of religion as a set of propositions, - hypotheses that are all too easy to mock if taken at face value.

Instead, these critics say, religion is a felt experience, a relationship or something.

Well, maybe - but it is still founded on propositions - the existence of a god, redemption, resurrection and so on -

- and if these are disbelieved it must lose its integrity and credibility.

And - much as its nicer believers may wish to dodge the question - religion needs to answer for real-world actions that are based on these propositions

- dogmas that the Vatican uses to justify intense obstruction in the UN and elsewhere of family-planning programmes or the use of condoms against AIDS or legalising abortions for 12-year-olds who have been raped.

For humanists, belief should be proportioned to evidence.

We see a value in scepticism when the evidence is inadequate and we reject dogma, religious, political or of any kind.

KARL POPPER

Karl Popper, a great political philosopher, wrote:

“Rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to contrary arguments and to learn from experience. . . [an attitude] of admitting that 'I may be wrong and you may be right and, by an effort, we may get nearer the truth'.”

So, Humanists aim is to get as close as we can to the truth.

We reject ideas & theories that are not reasonable, we proportion our belief to the evidence available, and we remain ready to revise our conclusions if the evidence changes.

We regard it as folly to believe things without enough evidence and even, depending on the circumstances, morally wrong to do so.

W K CLIFFORD

As William Clifford, the Victorian philosopher and mathematician, famously wrote: (*The Ethics of Belief*)

It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

This is a strong contrast with religions that value faith and belief in the teeth of the evidence.

The Christian father Tertullian said “I believe it because it is impossible”! (*Credo quia impossibile*)

Humanists think that belief against the evidence is not a virtue at all - in fact, it can be a vice, especially if it leads to damaging action.

In many cases finding the truth means turning to scientific enquiry, which has proved to be an outstandingly successful and reliable method of finding the truth since it came back into common use 200 or 300 years ago - back into use because the ancient Greeks and the early Islamic scientists were pretty good at it.

Just think how different - how much clearer and more comprehensible - our understanding of the world is now than only 200 or 300 years ago.

Then we had no idea
of the origins of disease,
of the way our bodies worked,
of the atomic structure of matter,
of the size or age of the universe,
of the evolution of species;

we had few medicines,
no painkillers,
no detergents,
no transport quicker than a horse and
only candles, the moon and stars for light at night.

All these things have come from scientific study of the world.

HENRI POINCARÉ

And science is a *method*, not a set of facts.

‘Science is built up with facts, as a house is with stones. But a collection of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house.’

Henri Poincaré - *Science and Hypothesis*

It is the method of forming a hypothesis, the simplest that will explain the known facts,

then deriving from it consequences that you can test - if that is true, then so must this be

and then by enquiry or experiment testing your hypothesis, possibly to destruction.

When you detect weaknesses or failures in it, you must amend the hypothesis and start again.

If it stands up to testing, it may get recognised as a theory - provisionally accepted but always open to question.

Science is simply the best - almost the only - way of finding out reliably about the world, but its answers are always provisional - always open to re-examination in the light of new evidence.

They are not eternal truths, never unquestionable. Newton's laws were overthrown by Einstein; Einstein's theories cannot accommodate quantum physics; string theory may overturn all our present ideas.

What science gives us is not the truth but an ever closer approximation to the truth.

Of course, scientists can go wrong - but that is human error or delinquency, not a fault with the method.

And this spirit of open-minded, rational enquiry is an important part of Humanism.

JOSHUA REYNOLDS

Of course, reason is not enough, and there are areas of life where it has nothing to say.

As Sir Joshua Reynolds said:

Reason, without doubt, must ultimately determine every thing; at this minute it is required to inform us when that very reason is to give way to feeling.

- *Sir Joshua Reynolds, 13th discourse (quoted in Guardian review of biography of JR 16.8.03)*

So, 'at this minute' let me turn to feeling and morality.

MORALITY BASED ON

As we have seen, it is a key humanist belief that our capacity for moral thinking arises from human nature, but its content is shaped by our experience and culture.

Our moral instincts are not necessarily a guide on how to behave but they are a good starting point, because they derive from patterns of behaviour that facilitated group survival

overlaid and worked on and adapted over thousands of years by our moral philosophy and practical reasoning.

But circumstances alter cases and particular formulations of morality and ethics can get out of date.

It is our responsibility to keep morality under review.

Humanist morality provides a way of thinking about these questions and not an answer to them.

In other words, the purpose of morality, as humanists see it, is not to conform to some pre-ordained model but to serve a human end
- human welfare and fulfilment.

Our moral framework can accommodate a utilitarian ethic or a virtue ethic or any number of positions in terms of moral philosophy.

But humanist morality does not go so far as to lay down fixed rules.

We are of course often damned for relativism in morals. Far from it.

It is not a humanist approach to say that what is right depends on the individual or is a matter of choice.

Our flexibility is not so unprincipled.

Instead we say that circumstances can alter cases: an act's morality depends on the whole of the circumstances in which it is to be carried out,

And part of the circumstances is our knowledge and our formulation of morality and ethical thinking.

But these can advance as we continue to think about moral dilemmas and confront new problems. Old formulations can get out of date and to stick with them dogmatically is misguided and can be immoral and vicious.

Our commitment to dialogue and ethical conversation is fundamental to humanist morality.

FRAMEWORK FOR MORALITY

But for all the flexibility, the touchstone is always human welfare and fulfilment.

And (as one would expect given the origin of morality in our existence as social animals) human welfare and fulfilment are socially determined.

They are based on the individual in society.

Society cannot exist without mutuality.

This even seems to be hard-wired into us

- a young child (the closest we can get to someone untainted by culture) already has a sense of fairness and sharing.

GOLDEN RULE

Mutuality is in fact fundamental to all morality, as is seen in the universality of the Golden Rule.

All religions and all ethical systems include the Golden Rule – it's a pity this poster does not include Humanism!

It is the rule of behaving to others as you would wish them to behave to you.

The Golden Rule surfaces and resurfaces across the world and across time as a central proposition

- which incidentally implies strongly that religions and non-religious beliefs and law codes are all influenced by the same ultimate facts around us
- in fact, that morality has influenced religion more than religion has influenced morality.

Mutuality implies directly the value of the individual and over time human moral thinking has come to impute this value to all humans on earth rather than just an in-group of family, tribe or nation.

So humanist morality attaches value and importance to the individual.

But the interdependence of the individual and society implies a duty of the individual to society we are individually responsible for our behaviour as it affects the collectivity of society.

And cooperation is the basis of living in communities and is also empirically observed to conduce to human welfare.

These considerations provide the framework for humanist moral thinking about particular issues.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES

So we are individually responsible for our own lives and collectively responsible for the future of the planet,

which makes it unsurprising that Humanists were very prominent in starting and running such bodies as the

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (*Lord Boyd-Orr*)
World Health Organisation (*Dr Brock Chisholm*)
UNESCO (*Sir Julian Huxley and Lord Ritchie-Calder*)
and the Open University (*Ritchie Calder, Jennie Lee*)

Our commitment to the value of the individual means that we are strongly committed to human rights -

- those definitions of the limits to which we will allow the majority or the authorities to go in restraining deviant individuals or minority groups from behaving in the way they wish.

We also have clear views about the organisation of society, especially now we have such a diverse community by contrast with the comparative (sometimes exaggerated) uniformity of past ages.

We stand for a free, open and inclusive society: one

“based on the recognition that people have divergent views and interests and that nobody is in possession of the ultimate truth”.

(George Soros: appendix to The Bubble of American Supremacy - Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004)

Given the huge disparity of lifestyles - religions and beliefs - in society today, that means that the government and official institutions must remain neutral on such questions.

There must be no privileges for Christians or Humanists or any other belief group.

We call such a state a **secular state** - not in any sense of being atheist but in the sense of neutral, providing a level playing field for all beliefs and religions.

But a secular state is not - or not necessarily - a secular society.

Secularism does not mean

(as opponents disingenuously pretend)

that the religious are barred from the public square -

only that they enter it on the same terms as everyone else,

without the traditional deference given to religious views,

and that decision-makers pay no attention to purely religious arguments, because they are meaningful only to the particular set of believers.

Too often the religions seek to impose their beliefs on everyone willy-nilly - in essence a totalitarian approach.

Humanists with their advocacy of the liberal, open society, seek to impose only freedom on others.

Secularism is in fact the best guarantor there is of freedom of religion or belief.

MEANING AND PURPOSE?

Finally we come to the 'existential' question of the meaning of life,
why are we here -
what is the purpose of life?

Well, using our reasoning powers, we start by examining the question and we soon see that it is muddled and needs to be taken apart.

Trees have no purpose: we may have uses for them - shade, or timber - but they just exist.

We may cut down a tree and make a table, and the table will have a purpose insofar as we plan to make use of it.

But life as a whole, as a phenomenon on earth or any other planet, has no purpose of this kind.

My life has no purpose in a sense analogous to the table that I make having a purpose.

MEANING AND PURPOSE - HUMAN CONSTRUCTS

Because purposes exist in minds.

However, in the absence of an ultimate purpose or meaning to the universe, humans have the capacity to create meaning and purpose for themselves.

What meaning we have is of our making.

Meaning and purpose are human constructs.

MEANING AND PURPOSE - EPICURUS

As Epicurus said:

‘Nothing arises in order that we may use it, but what arises has its uses.’

So, I can give my own life a purpose:

I can adopt goals that seem worthwhile, I can shape my life to achieve them -

and at the end look back and assess whether I have succeeded or failed, whether I have made good use of my time or not.

And my life will contribute to those of other people, who will remember me and be influenced by me after my death.

At a humanist funeral we remember and celebrate the life of the one we have lost and find comfort in our shared feelings of not just loss but also gratitude for what we have gained from his or her life.

THE GOOD LIFE

So what counts as ‘the good life’ for a humanist?

Well, the humanist approach allows for massive diversity in choices of “the good life”.

What exactly constitutes a meaningful, worthwhile, purposive flourishing life

is an area where we not only differ

but where it is good that we differ,

both because people are inherently different in their talents and inclinations

and because it allows different experiments in living, trying different models that feed off each other and lead to a diverse and interesting and flourishing human society.

However, a good life is more than one led with due regard to morality

- it also aims at happiness and fulfilment.

- and happiness means not just the absence of suffering or the passing of time in amusement but something much more substantial –

It is about having a rich emotional life in one's relations with other people, and about stretching one's capacities and achieving goals and fulfilling ambitions.

RUSSELL GOOD LIFE

Another formulation comes from Bertrand Russell -
A good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.

These two categories - love and knowledge - recur in humanist conceptions of the good life

- e.g., in AC Grayling *What is Good?* (a good introduction to humanist thought today), in popular philosophy, and in the lived experience of ordinary people now & in past.

Love - because it brings emotional joy and fulfilment

Knowledge - because of the intellectual joy and fulfilment of thinking and discovering.

RUSSELL DIE SOONER THAN THINK

Sadly as Russell himself acknowledged:

‘Many people would die sooner than think.
In fact they do so.’

Think about it.

SPIRITUALITY

Another aspect of fulfilment in life is that realm of elevated and intense experience that includes what the religious call spirituality.

This is a vexed word for Humanists because it seems to imply the existence of that transcendental realm, of souls and spirits that we reject.

But the experience is still very real, even if of natural origins.

‘The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union and emancipation has no specific intellectual content of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they

can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional moods’.

- William James *Varieties of Religious Experience*

Found in action and in meditation.

Spirituality -

- definition by BHA:

the 'spiritual' dimension comes from our deepest humanity. It finds expression in aspirations, moral sensibility, creativity, love and friendship, response to natural and human beauty, scientific and artistic endeavour, appreciation and wonder at the natural world, intellectual achievement and physical activity, surmounting suffering and persecution, selfless love, the quest for meaning and for values by which to live.

- leaflet *The Human Spirit*, c. 1992-5

- definition by Robert Ashby (former BHA director):

moments of being composed of emotion, imagination and memory - which somehow link up to take us beyond everyday awareness to an enhanced sense of reality.” - *speech to Sea of Faith conference 1998 (Wiley 357)*

Jeaneane Fowler: the spiritual dimensions of a school's life: "the secular awareness of beauty; the care of others; the care of animals and the environment; the appreciation of moving poetry; the ability to enjoy good music and the opportunity to express these areas in individual ways; a sense of awe and wonder at nature, which is often the catalyst for later enquiry" quoted Wiley p 365 from her *Humanism* p52.

BOOKS

That concludes what I have to say about Humanism itself. You can read more about it in many books ranging from Mike Rosen and Annemarie Young's book for young people up to a massive tome from Blackwells.

Richard Norman's book *On Humanism* from Routledge is the book I would pick out for an introduction.

BHA

As will be evident from what I've been saying, there is a great variety of Humanists and they find a unity in diversity

Motivations differ from individual to individual.

But enough have come together to support the British Humanist Association to make it a growing force in the life of Britain. We have defined what we want:

WHAT DO WE WANT?

- We want a world where everyone lives cooperatively on the basis of shared human values, respect for human rights, and concern for future generations.
- We want non-religious people to be confident in living ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity.

Implicit in these two aims is that we are realistic enough to know that there will never be a world where everyone is humanist,

so the first aim is for society as a whole

and the second is about the place in it for humanists.

WHAT DO WE DO?

- We **promote Humanism**, work on behalf of the non-religious, and support those who wish to live humanist lives, including through the provision of humanist ceremonies.
- We **campaign for a secular state**, challenge religious privilege, and promote equal treatment in law and policy of everyone regardless of religion or belief.
- We **offer a humanist perspective in public debate**, drawing on contemporary humanist thought and the worldwide humanist tradition.

BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

I am not going to go into detail about things you know as well as I do, just remind you briefly of what these generalities mean in practice.

PROMOTING HUMANISM

Promotion of Humanism is our form of evangelism - telling the good news!

But we don't do it not aggressively - no door-knocking or unsolicited approaches, just public education about Humanism -

- Websites – www.humanism.org.uk, H'st Life, H'st Heritage, Humanism for Schools, our FaceBook and Twitter and YouTube accounts and other websites incl. *ad hoc* ones for the atheist bus campaign and for some of our public campaigns, such as Holy Redundant, and (joint with Conway Hall) Really Simple Guide to Humanism
- Videos – Stephen Fry's That's Humanism series and many lectures on YouTube
- Annual public lectures - Voltaire, Darwin, Bentham, Holyoake, Shelley, Rosalind Franklin
- Annual conference
- Centre for Inquiry
- Speakers - for schools and other audiences

SUPPORT FOR OUR CONSTITUENCY

Humanists have a strong prejudice in favour of public services that make general provision for everyone) (having them provided in a sectarian, communitarian framework;

but we make exceptions where there is a need that affects 'our' people as with HHA, AAS - until general provision made.

Now:

Local groups & regional development officers.

Sections - AHS (students); LGBT Humanists; Defence Humanists; Young Humanists; Choir.

Volunteers on SACREs; other local engagement

Ceremonies: funerals; baby welcomings; weddings

Pastoral care in prisons and in hospitals

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CAMPAIGNING

We have more than two dozen campaigns!

All aim to defend the values of Humanism and the interests of humanist and non-religious people.

For example: campaigns on

- education - *religious education, collective worship; faith schools - including private fundamentalist schools; SRE; resisting creationism etc*
- secularism - *e.g., to get bishops out of the House of Lords, ultimately to achieve disestablishment; and opposing the government's obsession with 'faith communities';*
- campaigns to win reforms esp. where we find that part of the resistance to our aims is based on religion - *e.g. assisted dying, abortion, LGBT rights.*
- human rights - *incl free speech for humanist and atheist students against dictatorial student unions trying to curb them in the name of respect for religion, esp. Islam;*
- equality and non-discrimination, *opposing unwarranted religious exemptions, privileges (incl BBC) and claims based on phony claims of persecution; marriage law*

We have won respect from Parliament and govt departments for the quality of our work, and now have regular mtgs w some govt depts - FCO, DCLG

We run the APPHG;
and we support humanist groups in the main political parties.

We also now contribute regularly as an NGO at the UN Human Rights Council.

ACCORD

In the spirit of the Open Society and secularism, we are willing to work with others *ad hoc* even where we fundamentally disagree

- eg: (esp.) trying to reform faith schools - wide collaboration.

We took the initiative in forming Accord in 2008 – a wide coalition of religious, Humanist and educational organisations and teachers’ unions to campaign for more inclusive admissions policies In faith schools.

FAIR ADMISSIONS CAMPAIGN

In June 2013 we created another wide coalition – the Fair Admissions Campaign – with Accord, Ekklesia, RISC, Ted Cante’s iCoCo and many other supporting

organisations. It launches with a mapping of faith school admission policies, analysed by census district – FSM, ESL etc.

AN UNHOLY MESS

Last summer we produced for them
An Unholy Mess – an analysis of admissions policies for faith schools – almost all in breach of statutory code

BHA

END with sequence of faces

FACES

WEBSITES

with live links

And if you want to re-examine what I said about Humanism most of it is in a paper on my website.

END