

Glossary: Non-religious worldview traditions

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‘The good life’

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Good life

DEFINITION: The idea of a life that is worth living, is meaningful, full of happiness, and for most people has a positive impact on other people. For example, Humanists believe there is only one life, no after-life, and so this life should be meaningful and purposeful.

Agnostic

DEFINITION: A person who believes we do not or cannot know whether there is a god or gods.

Agnosticism

DEFINITION: The belief that we do not or cannot know whether there is a god, are gods or are no gods at all.

Atheism

DEFINITION: The belief that there is no god/s. ‘Theos’ comes from the Greek for god and ‘a’ is without.

Atheist

DEFINITION: A person who believes there is no god/s.

Autonomy

DEFINITION: In a non-religious context, this refers to the ability for people to live a good life and make their own moral choices without reference to god/s or any other sources of religious wisdom or authority.

Celebrant

DEFINITION: A celebrant is a person who supports and leads people to celebrate key life events. For example, funerals and weddings can be led by non-religious celebrants who will help someone plan a meaningful event and then lead and guide the event.

Consequentialism

DEFINITION: The belief that the consequences of any action must be considered before making any moral decisions.

Empathy

DEFINITION: The ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation. Many non-religious people and most Humanists believe that empathy, together with reason, can be a powerful force for social and political transformation which are important factors in the struggle for human rights and social justice.

Empiricism

DEFINITION: The theory that all knowledge is based on the experience of the senses, therefore if we cannot experience something, it cannot be true. This underpins the scientific method or approach.

Existentialism

DEFINITION: The idea that people are born without a predestined purpose, or in other words, we are all responsible for defining our own purpose in life. This philosophical theory was popularised by John Paul Sartre following the terrible events of World War II.

Happiness

DEFINITION: This can refer to the feeling of being happy, or to a general state of well-being. Happiness is an important idea in Humanism and for many others who are non-religious. For some people it is the goal of life, for others it is not as important as other values, such as duty or self-sacrificial love for others.

Happy Human

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Happy Human symbol

DEFINITION: A symbol that is used as the international symbolism of Humanism.

Humanism

DEFINITION: A non-theistic philosophy that places humanity at its centre, and is based around an ethical life that lays emphasis on human achievement and flourishing.

It is a worldview that looks to science and other evidence to understand the universe. Humanists believe there is only one life, and people should do their best to live a meaningful or purposeful one.

They believe that their actions should be supported by evidence. Humanists feel that they should make decisions to improve the lives of others by working to improve human rights and social justice.

Humanist

DEFINITION: A person whose beliefs focus on the achievements and wellbeing of humanity, and places emphasis on the scientific method of understanding the world. Humanists do not believe in god/s, and make their decisions based on reason, empathy and a concern for the common good of humans and animals. They believe that this is the one life we have and seek to give their own life meaning and to help others to live well.

Humanists UK

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: British Humanists, HumanistsUK

DEFINITION: A membership organisation that began in 1896, who aim to put humanism into practice through campaigning, educational work and ceremonial services. There are equivalent organisations in many other countries.

Morality

DEFINITION: A set of personal or social standards for good or bad behaviour or character. Many non-religious people, including most Humanists, aim to make moral and ethical decisions based on reason, science and a concern for the well-being of human beings and other sentient animals.

Naturalistic

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Naturalism

DEFINITION: A belief that the universe and all that is in it were not created by supernatural events or by a god/s. There is a natural cause or explanation for the universe and all its parts.

Nihilism

DEFINITION: A philosophy rejecting meaning, purpose and values in life. It is a philosophy that is associated with Nietzsche in the first half of the Nineteenth Century.

Non-religious

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Nones, Non religious

DEFINITION: This is not an organised group but a diverse mix of people, with a wide variety of values, beliefs and ways of seeing the world. They do not belong to a religion. Most non-religious people believe we can live a fulfilling life without believing in god/s. They are sometimes referred to as the 'nones', particularly by sociologists.

Non-religious worldviews

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Non religious worldviews

DEFINITION: Non-religious worldviews are ways of making sense of life without reference to the teachings of a religious tradition. These can take diverse forms, including humanism and Spiritual But Not Religious outlooks.

Postmodernism

DEFINITION: This began in the mid 20th century, challenging the assumptions of 'modernist' thought. In relation to religion, postmodernists believe that religions have lost their significance in society. As a result of this, they cannot encourage societal stability or change.

Pragmatism

DEFINITION: Thinking of or dealing with problems and decisions in a practical and sensible manner. In philosophical terms, thinkers such as William James describe it as a method that focuses on the practical consequences of an idea to find out its meaning.

Rationalist

DEFINITION: Someone who bases their decisions on logic, evidence and reason and not on religious belief. Examples of rationalist philosophers are Descartes and Spinoza.