

GOOD



without a God

An illustrated guide to humanism

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Good Without a God

You have probably heard it innumerable times: “In order to be a good person, you need to believe in God.” Even more frequently, you must have been confronted with the mantra: “If you don’t believe in God, then what do you believe in?”

This prejudice is so entrenched in our society that it still lingers on despite having long been refuted on all fronts, not only in the erudite discussions of philosophers and theologians, but also in the daily lives of billions of people across the world who “live well without God” - people, in other words, who lead an ethically-oriented life with no need or desire to embrace any religious faith.

Now, there is an international movement that has taken the concept of “living well without God” and developed it into a coherent and positive life stance. It is called humanism, a philosophy that puts human beings and their empathetic and rational abilities on centre stage. The main values of humanism include individual freedom, reason, scientific progress, empathy, and the active engagement in several fights for secularism, women’s rights, LGBT people, and so on.

Does it sound interesting to you? Want to know more? This is just the book you need: it will give you an outline of humanist values and fights, and perhaps convince you – in case you are not already – that you can be “*good without a God*”, in the words of the American Humanist Association’s motto.

As a matter of fact, even though you have never heard of humanism, chances are you will realise you have been a humanist all along!



1. Individuals

Humanism, at its core, is concerned with individuals, embracing their diversity in terms of preferences, interests and opinions. This sets it apart, in a fundamental way, from most traditional belief systems, which tend to put community before individuals.

Humanism grants equal dignity and equal rights to all individuals as *individuals* – no matter what community, or communities, they might belong to.

Conversely, in other worldviews, individuals may be given dignity and rights conditionally, based on their belonging to a certain community – abandoning which can sometimes result in the complete loss of dignity, rights and, in extreme cases, life.

Think of religious fundamentalisms, which separate believers from unbelievers, labelling the latter as “**apostates**”, people they often **ostracise** or persecute because of their choice. Or consider nationalisms, which draw a line between “us” and “them”, offering greater rights and dignity to a subset of individuals solely because they happen to be, by sheer accident, citizens of one Country, instead of another.



Humanism, on the contrary, purports to be universal. It rejects all kinds of discrimination based on group identity, maintaining that – whatever their biological, cultural and political differences – all individuals are equally worthy of recognition, both by other individuals and by political and religious institutions.



2. Freedom and self-determination

The recognition of the autonomy and dignity of individuals has a specific ethical and political implication.

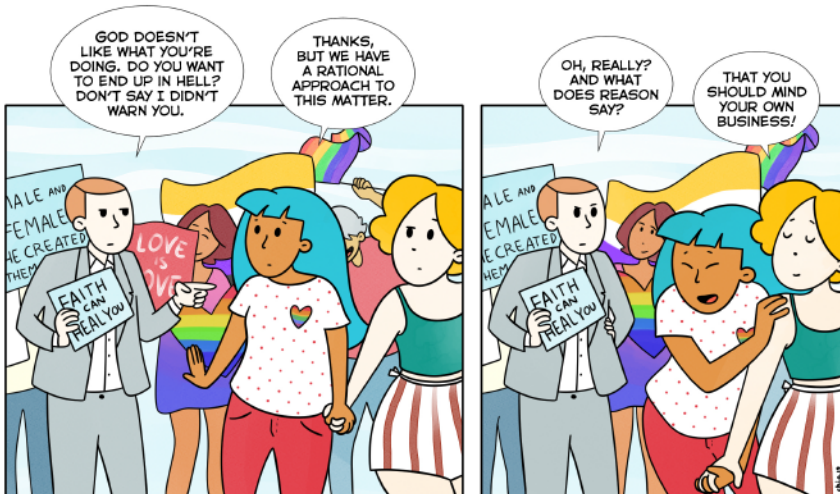
According to humanism, individuals are free to be and act as they wish, within the limits of other people's freedom, unlike traditional philosophies that consider individuals **heteronomous** (i.e., relying on an external moral authority), thus expected to conform to what tradition and **orthodoxy** prescribe as "right" and "normal".

Think of homosexuality, for instance. Many religions condemn it as a sin, and based on that, they discriminate (or even persecute) gay people, believers or otherwise.

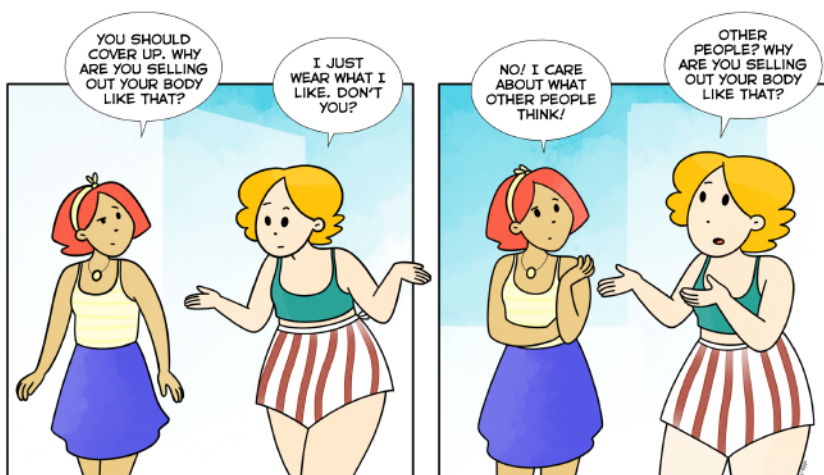
Humanism, on the other hand, acknowledges and stands up for the right of all individuals to love freely whoever they want and in the manner they choose, precisely because it attests that «over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign», in the words of John Stuart Mill, one of the most prominent humanist philosophers ever existed.



Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.
John Stuart Mill



This principle of individual **autonomy** extends far beyond sexual orientation and lays out a clear and reasonable path to entitle the individual with a broad spectrum of liberties, within a plural and heterogeneous society – a society made up of many individuals, all different from each other, with divergent and often antithetical identities, opinions and interests.



3. Reason as a guiding principle

Once acknowledged the autonomy and dignity of the individual, we move on to a perhaps even more important question: *how* are humanists supposed to act?

A comprehensive answer to this question would take up hundreds of pages of a philosophy book, but we can boil it down to this: humanists try their best to act as much as possible *in the light of reason*.

Yes, because for humanism, the guiding principle of moral behaviour is reason, defined as the thinking faculty that distinguishes humans from all other non-human living beings, and which has allowed humanity to thrive and progress to where we are today.

You can think of reason as a powerful multi-tool that, if used properly, enables humans to pull off a great many feats: process and share complex and universal ideas abstracted from the tangible and the particular; identify problems and devise effective strategies to solve them; minimise efforts and maximise results; distinguish truth from falsehood in an objective way, on the basis of scientific evidence, a rigorous use of logic and a discussion always open to doubt; build, pass on and preserve an ever-widening set of knowledge, from generation to generation... The list could go on.



Unlike humanism, many traditional philosophies appeal to other questionable sources of knowledge, such as:

- *authority* – one thing is true because it is endorsed by a certain person or institution;
- *tradition* – one thing is right because it has been around for a long time;
- *instinct* – one thing is true because I instinctively feel that it is so;
- *mysticism* – one thing exists because in a moment of super-rational ecstasy I perceived its existence;
- *fear* – one thing is true because I am afraid to contemplate the consequences of if being false;
- *irrationality* itself - one thing is true in that it is absurd from a rational point of view.

Humanism considers the above as illegitimate sources of knowledge and, whilst openly acknowledging the intrinsic limits of reason, attests to its power and effectiveness, embracing it as the first guiding principle of human action.



4. Science as method

We have defined reason as a powerful multi-tool that enables humans to achieve so many things. One of its most prominent accomplishment is scientific research.

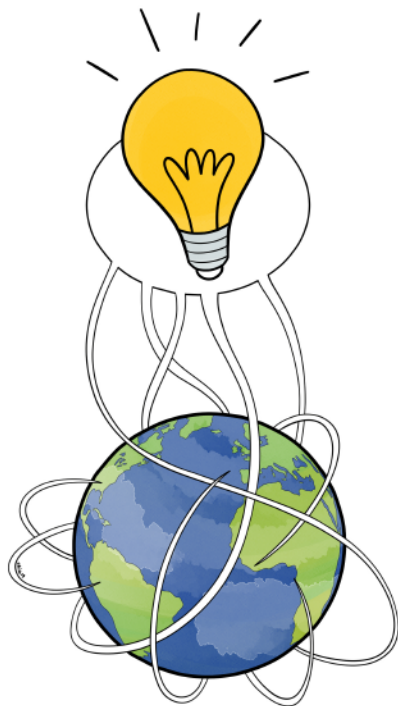
“Science” must be understood as the set of disciplines that, through an objective and universal method, analyse the external world (and the living beings inhabiting it) in order to understand its workings and subsequently, through technology, come up with new solutions to better adapt to it.

The scientific method, first detailed by Galileo Galilei in the seventeenth century, is based on a well-defined series of procedures: first of all, (1) the *observation* of natural phenomena, followed by (2) the formulation of *hypotheses* regarding the functioning of those phenomena; and then (3) the verification (or rebuttal) of those hypotheses through objective and replicable experiments; finally, in case the hypothesis is confirmed, the process ends with (4) the elaboration of a *coherent theory*, universally valid for the type of phenomenon studied.



*The universe is written in mathematical language, and the letters are
triangles, circles and other geometrical figures...*
Galileo Galilei

Ever since Galilei, the scientific method has proved to be extremely reliable and powerful, and has been further reinforced with the establishment of new methods and processes (such as **peer-reviewing**); it has radically changed the lives of all human beings and brought about an unprecedented collective progress – that is why humanists cherish science and the scientific method so much.



Science, per se, has nothing magic about it: it does not proceed by leaps and bounds, nor requires belief in order to work; on the contrary, it is a painstaking and slow collective undertaking that requires the commitment and cooperation of millions of scientists from around the world.

The potential of science is enormous, for better or worse, and that is why it needs to be supervised and tempered by the values of humanism, to ensure it is put to the service of all humanity. As the *Amsterdam Declaration* states: «science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends».

Science
gives us the means

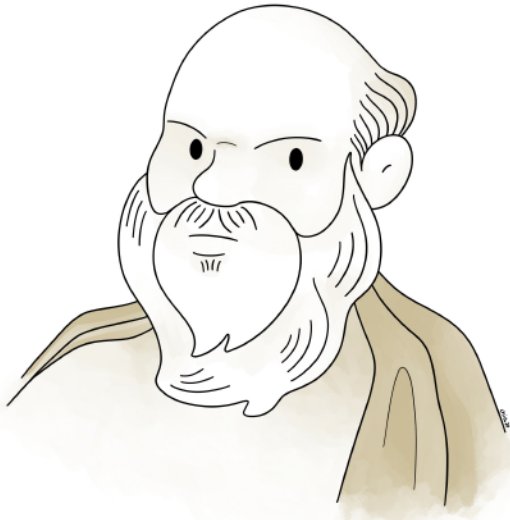


but
human values
must propose the ends

5. Freedom of thought as a precondition for progress

We have mentioned how reason enables human beings to achieve many things; however, this is only true on one condition: that humans are free to use it *in form and substance*.

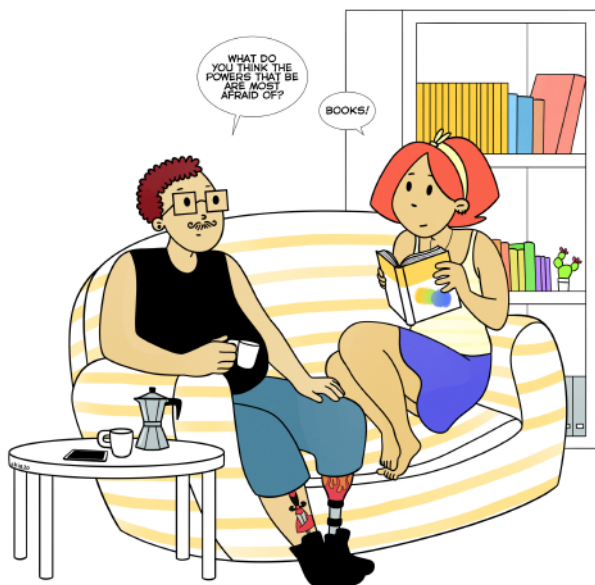
They must be free to think, research, experiment, express, disagree and make mistakes, and also free to know and criticise other people's ideas, share and challenge their own, and change their mind, if necessary, in case new evidence or stronger arguments prove that they'd been wrong; finally, they must be free to admit their ignorance in the face of unknown or unsolvable issues, in the candid spirit of Socrates' saying, "I know that I don't know".



Socrates is wise because he knows that he knows nothing,
keeping in mind the limits of his knowledge.

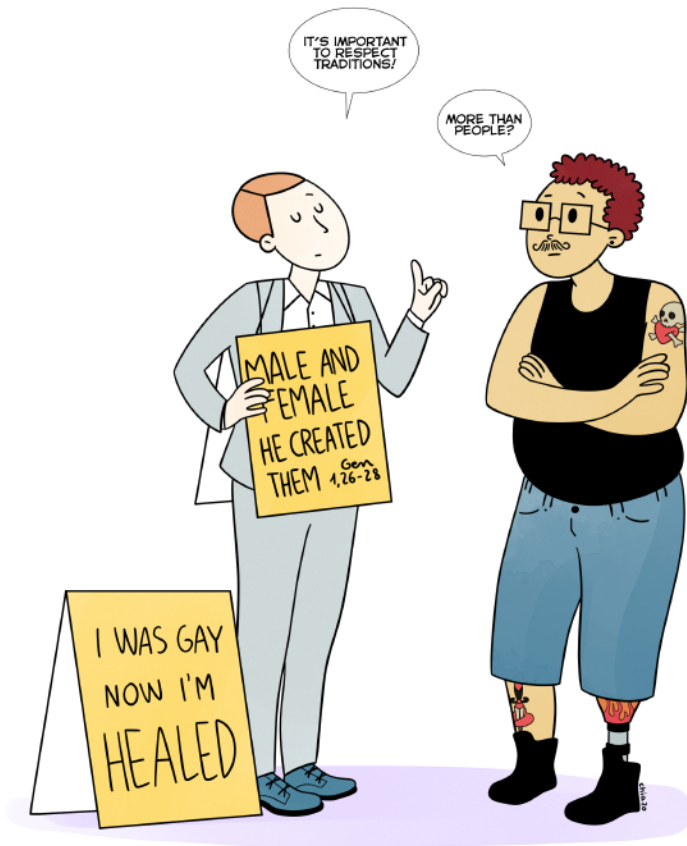
Without freedom of thought, reason is like a blunt and faulty pocketknife, capable in theory of many things, but practically unable to do much; it's also exposed to the risk of ending up in the wrong hands and being used for evil purposes.

In this sense, freedom of thought is a necessary (but not sufficient) precondition for reason to actually work in the long term for the advancement of humanity. It is no coincidence that the staunchest opponents of freedom of thought have been (and still are) those who see human progress as a threat to their power – basically those who are interested in maintaining the *status quo* through the methodical repression of dissent: religious and ecclesiastical fundamentalists, dictators and oligarchs, criminal organisations, economic and power lobbies, and so on.



On the contrary, humanism «has no **dogmas** and imposes no beliefs on its adherents», but is rather «an alternative to religious dogmatism», as once again stated in the *Amsterdam Declaration*.

This is because humanists are acutely aware of the nearly four millennia of human history that have shown how the free flow of ideas is the only way to attain progress, while the darkest centuries have been defined precisely by obscurantism and censorship stifling freedom of thought, research and expression.



6. Democracy as a levee

Once acknowledged the dignity of each individual as an individual, how do we reconcile the existence in societies of millions of individuals with heterogeneous and often conflicting views and interests?

In other words, how can millions of people who want very different things come together?

It doesn't cut it to just say "my freedom ends where yours begins", the core tenet of **anarchist** views, based on a somewhat optimistic understanding of human nature according to which humans, left to their own devices, are perfectly capable of self-control and do not need a State to wield power, establish laws and impose sanctions on those who break them.

At the opposite end of anarchist optimism is the pessimism of **tyrannical** and **totalitarian regimes**. Through the lenses of such pessimism, human beings look inherently incapable of acting virtuously on their own accord and constantly need an enlightened guide – a King, a Leader, a Party – to keep them on the straight and narrow by setting in stone what is Good for the individuals and imposing this Good on the society as a whole, by carrot or by stick.

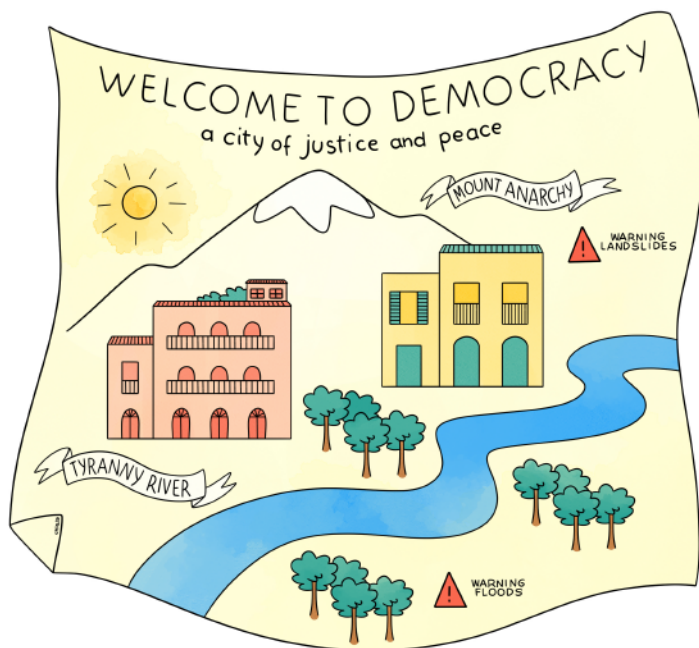
When it comes to human nature, humanism is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It's **realistic**. Concurring with Kant's assessment that «from such crooked wood as that which man is made of, nothing straight can be fashioned», it distrusts anarchist as much as tyrannical and totalitarian utopias.



*From such crooked wood as that which man is made of,
nothing straight can be fashioned.*
Immanuel Kant

This is why humanism endeavours, with lucidity and perseverance, to set up and maintain a democratic regime, where power is provisionally apportioned to all citizens, represented by several independent institutions, thus keeping in check both the chaos that would result from the absolute absence of rules, and the injustice that would result from the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals, or just one.

You can picture society as a small town squeezed between the mountains and a river. When it rains heavily, this town is exposed to both landslides and floods. To avert the former danger, citizens need to build their homes according to precise safety rules; to avert the latter, it is necessary for citizens to keep watch over the banks of the river, ensuring they are prepared to shore them up if necessary.



Democracy is therefore the two-front process of *containing disorder and fending off tyranny*, enlisting all citizens to play their individual role. It is a collective, continuous and imperfect process, always susceptible to failure – yet it is the best system at our disposal, and as such it has to be preserved with care, vigilance and a sense of responsibility.



RAISE YOUR HANDS!

7. Secularism as a political principle

Secularism is probably one of the most misunderstood humanist values. For instance, it is particularly common to misconstrue “secularism” as a synonym of “anti-religiousness”, “atheism” or similar. Nothing could be further from the truth. Secularism is neither a way of life nor an “atheist” philosophy. It has nothing to say about our conduct in every-day life, let alone which god we are supposed to believe or not to believe in.

Secularism is something else. Far from questioning the *contents* of religion, it only establishes the *limits* within which religious institutions are allowed to operate alongside State institutions – and vice-versa. In this sense, secularism is nothing but a political principle that establishes clear and impenetrable boundaries between the state and the churches, in order to safeguard the hold of a true and fully-fledged democratic regime.

But why is secularism so important to democracy? Because failing secularism, democracy is inevitably exposed to at least three dangers.

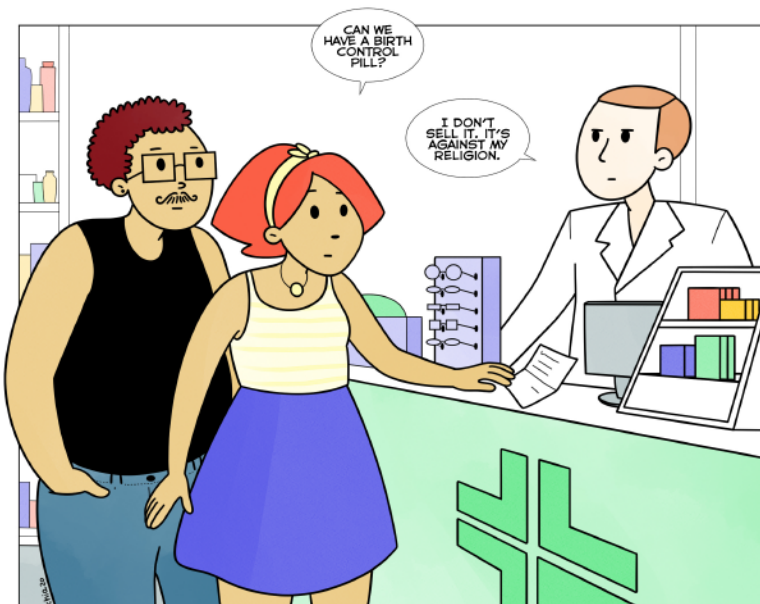
The first is what we might call the **theocratic** threat, i.e. the risk of religion becoming too powerful and hegemonic, to the point of seizing political-state power and imposing its ideology to the whole society – which, as we know, includes citizens with very different beliefs and interests.



Now, if we agree that democracy is based on the mutual limitation of powers, it follows that religious power needs to be curbed, too; not as the expression of an anti-religious or **anti-clerical** attitude, but for the sake of democracy itself, and with the sole purpose of preventing religion from taking over the other two pillars of society, namely economy and politics.

The second threat to the democracy, lacking secularism, concerns freedom *of* religion itself – that’s right: freedom *of* religion! Because, paradoxically, religious power needs limitations *even* in a society entirely made up of citizens of the same faith.

Picture a Catholic country, say Italy, with no atheists or followers of other faiths: in a scenario where the Catholic Church were given free rein, it could impose Catholicism as State Religion, make it mandatory to attend Sunday Mass, ban the sale of condoms and birth-control pills, repeal abortion laws, declare homosexuality a crime, enforce harsh penalties for blasphemy. How many “liberal” and “non-aligned” Catholics would suffer restrictions to their individual freedom? Lots. And lots.



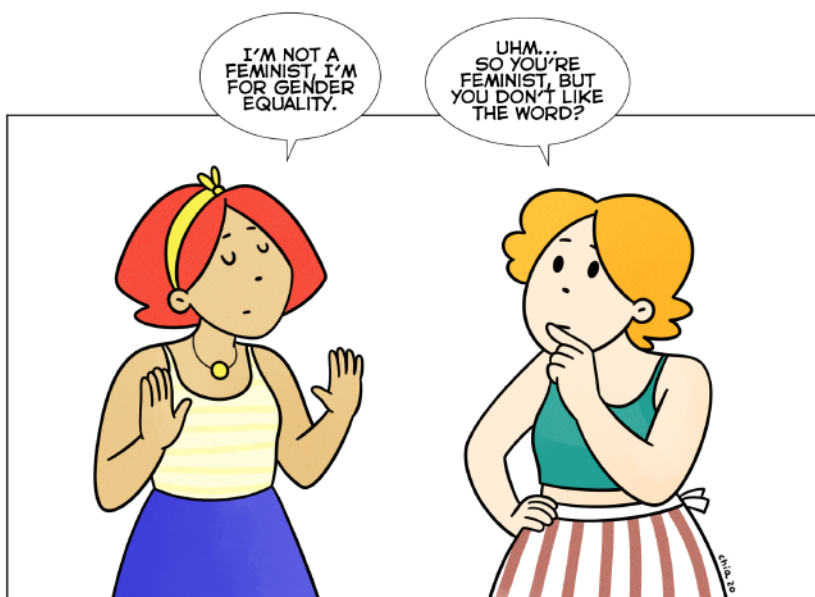
This leads us to a third risk, closely related to the second: the endangerment of freedom *from* religion, defined as the right to live and think freely without discriminations or impositions by a religious power, regardless of one's personal convictions.

You can see how secularism is truly an all-encompassing value, which believers and non-believers alike must come together to defend, cooperatively and undivided. Because it is in everyone's interest – literally, each and every one!

8. Feminism and/is gender equality

After sketching the core values of humanism, let's now take a look at some of the causes it champions, starting with one of the most important: feminism.

Just like “secularism,” the term “feminism” can be controversial and is often misunderstood. Many people, to this day, are wary of even uttering the word. Some seem to use feminism as a synonym of **misandry** (i.e. hatred for the male gender), others believe it denotes the battle of women to relegate men to a position of inferiority, and so on. Nothing of the kind.



The only objective of feminism is to reform society so that the biological difference between men and women is no longer a factor of discrimination, in either direction, closing therefore a cultural *gap* imposed and consolidated through millennia of human history marked by **patriarchal** privilege.

In a nutshell: feminism strives for men and women to be treated equally. Nothing more, nothing less.



As humanists, we believe in the universal dignity of individuals – so, how could we not support the feminist cause?

Some argue that using the label “feminist” has become pointless and outdated, claiming it suffices to be good people to bring about the desired change. This argument – which applies to many other labels, including “humanist” – is unfortunately naive, lazy and idealistic.

It’s naive, because it wrongly assumes that it is enough to appeal to common sense (“be good”) for people to suddenly shed their deep-rooted habits, unconscious bias, cultural and birth privileges, and so on.

It’s lazy, because dismissing the label “feminist” as “pointless” is just another way to shirk personal responsibility, leaving it to society to progress sooner or later on its own, without our contribution, and assuming that eventually the demands of feminism will be automatically granted.

Finally, it’s idealistic, not only because it fails to acknowledge that the path to women’s emancipation is a history of fights, sacrifices and hard work – all of which have been instrumental in achieving things like **universal suffrage** – but also because it glosses over the fact that in other parts of the world universal suffrage and many other basic rights of women are far from being achieved!

That’s why it is important for every humanist to advocate “**out and loud**” for this cause. Hopefully the day will come when all feminist demands are fulfilled and the “feminist” label can indeed be tossed on the scrapheap like many others, but right now, as of 2020, that day is yet to be glimpsed over the horizon.

9. The right to love freely

The same idea applies to LGBT+ rights. Just like feminism, the ultimate goal of the LGBT+ movement is for all individuals to be treated equally, regardless of biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, forms of loving, and so on.

What does it matter whether a person is attracted to the opposite sex or to the same sex – or both, even? It doesn't at all, because #LovelsLove, and it would be utterly **anachronistic** to claim the opposite, based on unsubstantiated notions, whether novel or traditional.

But the distinctive trait of the LGBT+ movement – as well as the humanist movement – is its dynamism, its constant evolution. This is because the more society evolves, the more we become aware of identities and forms of love that were previously concealed and repressed – or rather, concealed *because* repressed.

The evolution of the acronym LGBT+ is a significant point in case: in the past, the accepted version of it was LGBT, as in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, **Transsexual** and **Transgender**; the current complete acronym is LGBTQIAPK – but there's always room for additional letters, as we go forward! Don't be put off by this complexity: behind each of these letters there are real people, just like you – in fact, you might be one of them!



The letter “Q” stands for Queer – people whose sexual identity eludes the male-female binarism and tend to refer to themselves as non-binary.

“I” represents Intersex people, individuals whose genetic and biological makeup is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female – people born with ambiguous genitalia, for instance.

“A” is for Asexual, people who fall in love without experiencing the need to have sex.

The letter “P” stands for Polyamory, a type of love where, unlike monogamy, people love more than one person at

once, in an ethical – that is, open and consensual – way. “P” also covers **pansexuality**, the love of people regardless of their gender. It slightly differs from bisexuality, as explained in the glossary.

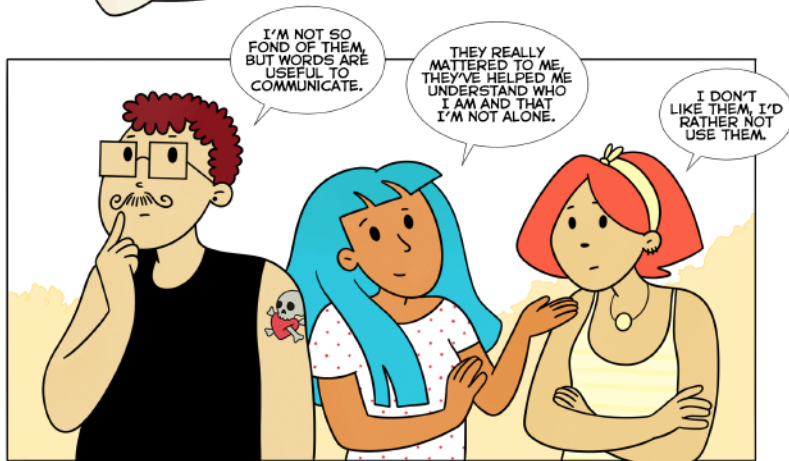
Finally, the “K” refers to the galaxy of unconventional and eccentric sexual practices that go under the umbrella term “Kinky”, including, most notably, **BDSM** – you’re welcome, again, to look it up in the glossary if you don’t know what that means!

If you’re feeling dizzy at this point, don’t worry: it’s normal. All you need to do is familiarise with this reality and be keen to listen with an open mind. You may never identify with any of those letters, but that doesn’t keep you from empathising with fellow humans, and fighting for other people’s right to be themselves and to love freely.

This is actually one of the coolest things about humanism: the ability to listen to everyone, trying to understand the perspectives of others, and defending at all times their right to be different. Because, in love as in everything else, diversity is freedom.



WHATEVER!
I DON'T GET ALL
THESE LABELS! THEY
ARE POINTLESS AND
RIDICULOUS.



I'M NOT SO
FOND OF THEM,
BUT WORDS ARE
USEFUL TO
COMMUNICATE.

THEY REALLY
MATTERED TO ME.
THEY'VE HELPED ME
UNDERSTAND WHO
I AM AND THAT
I'M NOT ALONE.

I DON'T
LIKE THEM, I'D
RATHER NOT
USE THEM.

DO YOU
REMOVE LABELS
FROM YOUR
CLOTHES?

I DO,
IF THEY
BOTHER
ME.

BUT YOU'D
NEVER TAKE
THEM OFF OTHER
PEOPLE'S
CLOTHES!



10. A fight that concerns us all: climate change

We have mentioned the dynamism of the humanist movement, always ready to evolve and take on new fights. One of these is unquestionably the fight against the infamous *climate change*.



Mind you, combating *climate change*, before being a *humanist* cause, is a *human* fight, concerning all (literally all) the 7.5 billion inhabitants of Planet Earth - not to mention the 11 billion human beings who will be alive in 2100, including your hypothetical children and grandchildren, who will suffer the most severe consequences of our foolishness today. What's

at stake here is not the survival of one particular worldview, but of the *entire human species*. Preventing *climate change* is, in this sense, the most universal and transversal challenge, a fight that every human must engage in, regardless of individual opinions on morals, politics, art, and so on.

Scientific evidence speaks for itself and leaves no room for interpretation: if we comply with the 2015 **Paris Agreement**, by the end of the century the global temperature will go up by at least two degrees and the seas will rise by half a metre; if on the other hand we maintain our current consumption standards, the temperature will go up by five degrees, with a sea-level rise of 120 cm. The choice we are facing is no longer between the current state or a slightly worse condition. The choice is between containing the damage or succumbing, dying, disappearing – in a word: extinction.

Yes, extinction – if that word sounds exaggerated to you, answer these questions. Do you like Venice? If we do nothing *today*, by 2100 it will have sunk like Atlantis. What about Rome? Same fate for that city and its five million inhabitants. Osaka, Shanghai, Miami, Rio De Janeiro, the Maldives? Gone. And bear in mind that the rising sea level is just one of the many consequences of *climate change*!

Do you fully understand the importance of this challenge? And do you realise how irresponsible it is, both individually and internationally, to simply carry on with business as usual?

This is where, as humanists, we must pull out all the stops and take urgent action, no ifs or buts. Shying away would be like belying our values, in particular our trust in the scientific method, given that the consensus of scientists on this mat-

ter is virtually unanimous: 97% of climatologists agree that humans and their consumptions are triggering global warming and climate change.

No more excuses, then. And most importantly, we have run out of time. We should have got going – in earnest – 50 years ago. But that's okay: it's not too late to start acting now, individually and collectively. Because this fight concerns everyone, and dawdling, at this stage, would be nothing short of insane.



11. Empathy, justice, humanity

This short journey into humanist philosophy is coming to an end, but we can't wrap it up without touching on a series of fundamental questions, such as: what is it that unites human beings? What drives them to strive for a fairer world? And why doesn't humanism include the "god" option?

The answer to the last question is relatively simple: humanism excludes the concept of god because it requires a leap of mystical and irrational faith that reason simply does not allow. It is not out of bitterness, or in a spirit of rebellion, that humanists do not believe in god. It is rather because of their trust in human reason that they cannot afford the leap to transcendence. The evidence for God is insufficient and contradictory, while current scientific and philosophical knowledge allows, on the contrary, to conceive life and the world in a relatively mature and coherent way, without any need for god.

Moreover, this short journey has already shown you that human beings don't need either God or religion as a «moral compass» to «orientate themselves in the world», to borrow a line from Kant. And if you are wondering why humanists are in general so committed to implement the values we have mentioned, the answer is just as simple: because a humanist world is a better place for everyone to live in, including those who are not humanists.

It is indeed better for everyone to live in a world where scientific research is free to progress, discover new treatments and technologies that can extend human life and make it less painful. It is better for everyone to live in a world where we are all free to be what we are, to cultivate our personali-

ties and interests, and to love who we want. It is also better for everyone to live in a world where human beings work hand in hand to ensure that birth privileges and socio-economic inequalities are ironed out and do not hinder the blossoming of individuals – with their “inalienable right to pursue happiness”, to quote the constitution of the United States of America.

Humanism is good for everyone because it unites us beyond our differences. Rather than dividing, excluding and **ostracizing**, humanism invites everyone to meet halfway on the common ground we call “human nature”. This idea is both concrete and mutable: concrete, because genetics has determined once and for all that there are no such things as human races and that humans share the same DNA at every latitude of the globe; mutable, because humanity has come to realise it has the power to change not just its habitat (scientists call this geological age **Anthropocene**), but also its millennial traditions and even its genetic makeup (with regard to this, some thinkers have already proposed the idea of **Transhumanism**).

Yes, human beings, with the use of reason, can mould themselves and redesign the world to make it more just and beautiful than the present one. On the flipside, by the same principle, humans can just as easily use their powers to annihilate themselves, destroy the only planet they have, or turn it into a more unjust and uglier world than the one we currently live in.

The choice is ours. humanism invites you to bet everything on human beings and their empathetic and rational abilities: *play your game!*

Different people



same rights!



Glossary

Anarchy: literally “lack of government” (or rather, “lack of principle”) from the Greek *a* (without) and *archè* (principle, government). In political philosophy, the anarchist doctrine advocates the need to get rid of all forms of law, government, power and hierarchy, affirming the possibility for human beings to spontaneously govern themselves, without the need for external impositions or a state order.

Anticlericalism: literally, “against the clergy”, that is, the priests of the Catholic Church. By extension, “anti-clerical” indicates a political and philosophical attitude of fierce opposition to every religious institution.

Anthropocene: a term coined in the 80s by biologist Eugene F. Stoermer, taking root in common parlance from the 2000s. The word is composed of *anthropos* (man) and a derivative of *kainos* (recent, new). Anthropocene thus indicates the crossing over of humanity into a new geological era dominated by human activity itself - an era in which, unlike previous ones, human activities can drastically alter the natural habitat, potentially upsetting it to the point of jeopardising the survival of the human species itself.

Apostasy: the act of abandoning a religion; from the Greek *apo* (from, in the sense of moving away from something) and *stasis* (stay). In 2020 apostasy is still a crime in 18 countries across the world. Of these 18, six punish it with prison, 12 with the death penalty.

BDSM: an acronym that encompasses a series of “unconventional” erotic and relational practices (kink), based on mutual consent and the creation of a safe space where to

share, explore and indulge personal fantasies. Specifically, the acronym merges three macro-categories of practices: Bondage & Discipline (B&D), Domination & Submission and (D&S), Sadism & Masochism (S&M). Each person has a different and specific BDSM sphere. One may be attracted to a more or less large number of practices, or none – the latter case is referred to as ‘vanilla sex’, a conventional approach to sexuality. BDSM practices have been known for centuries, but it is only in recent decades that the term has gained widespread acceptance. Depending on the context, members of the BDSM community are more or less severely stigmatised – it’s the so-called kink shaming (see glossary under “kinky”). Hopefully, with the evolution of society and greater openness on the topic of sexuality, this stigma will gradually disappear – it is in this spirit that we have decided to include an entry for “BDSM” in this glossary.

Bisexual: person attracted to two or more sexual genders.

Dogma: from the Greek *dogma*, or “decree, decision”; a universal and indisputable truth, axiomatically imposed by an institution (generally a religious one) and blindly believed by the followers of that institution. In the eyes of both the religious institution and its followers, a dogma is true regardless of rational evidence, or even when outright contradicting it. Examples of dogmas are the papal infallibility, proclaimed in 1870 by Pius IX, according to which “the Pope cannot be wrong when speaking *ex cathedra*”; or the immaculate conception, also proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854, claiming that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, was born “without original sin”.

Heteronomy/Autonomy: heteronomy – from the Greek *éteros* (different, other) and *nómos* (law, government, norm)

– indicates the reliance of individuals on external norms. Autonomy – with the prefix *auto* (own) – denotes the exact opposite, that is, the ability of individuals to act on the basis of norms that they have come up with themselves.

Misandry: from the Greek *misos* (hatred) and *andria* (man), indicates the hatred of people of the male gender.

Obscurantism: an attitude of hostility and opposition to the spread of knowledge, education and economic and technological progress. The word “Obscurantism” is an antonym to the word “Enlightenment”, both in content and form. While Enlightenment is the attitude of using reason to enlighten the world, obscurantism wants to switch off the light of reason and take advantage of darkness (i.e. ignorance) to extend its power.

Orthodoxy: from the Greek *ortho* (right, just, correct) and *doksia* (opinion), it means literally the “right opinion”, while in a broad sense it indicates full conformity to a given doctrine, be it religious or political. This contrasts with “heterodoxy”, which denotes any opinion at odds with that doctrine.

Ostracize: in Ancient Greece, “ostracism” was a legal practice consisting of a ten-year exile imposed on those who represented a threat to the city. By extension, ostracizing means to expel and ban people who are considered dangerous by a community, religious or otherwise.

Out and loud: “Out” can also refer to people who are “out of the closet”, that is, living their sexual identity (or any other part of their identity) openly and without hiding.

Pansexual: a person attracted to other people *regardless* of

their gender.

Paris Agreement: Signed in 2015 in Paris, it is the “first universal and legally binding global climate agreement” adopted by 195 countries. It outlines “a global action plan, aimed at putting the world back on track to avoid dangerous climate changes by limiting global warming well below 2°C.” It is a “minimum-objective” agreement, so to speak, because it aims at containing the damage, rather than avoiding it. That is why it is essential to implement it at global level, uncompromisingly, given that the agreement itself is already the result of a compromise between environmental protection and economic growth. Regrettably, in 2017 the United States – one of the most important economic and industrial players in the world – have made the astonishing move to sign out of the Paris Agreement, which, according to President Trump, would “damage the US economy.” This is an act of outlandish irresponsibility, not only because it weakens and delegitimises the agreement, but also because it promotes the idea that the fight against *climate change* is an optional endeavour, while in fact it is urgent and essential.

Patriarchate: a term that originally refers to the social and family system in which power and assets are passed on from father (*pater*) to son; the opposed is true in a “matriarchy” system, where the hand-over process goes from mothers to daughters. However, today the term “patriarchy” has come to refer to the thousand-year-old cultural and political system in which male humans are considered culturally, intellectually, sexually, morally and biologically superior to females.

Peer-reviewing: the review of an academic and scientific work by a person with the same degree of knowledge and experience as the author of the work. Peer-reviewing is es-

entially a rigorous and collective verification process, which allows to establish in an objective (but not infallible) way whether a paper deserves to be published. Peer-reviewing can also be “blind”, when the identity of the author is not disclosed to the auditor. The idea is that anonymity guarantees a greater degree of impartiality.

Status quo: Latin expression used to indicate the “current situation”, the “state of things”, often with the negative connotation of immobilism – “maintaining the *status quo*” means to wish for everything to remain as it is, shunning the idea of progress.

Theocracy: whereas “democracy” is the system of government where “power” (*kratos*) belongs to the “people” (*dem-os*), “theocracy” is the system where power ultimately resides in “God” (*theós*) and is exercised “in the name of God” by its middle-men. In general, we call theocracies those regimes where the political power is closely intertwined (or entirely coincides) with the religious one.

Totalitarianism: a term referring to the authoritarian regimes of the nineteenth century (National Socialism, Fascism, Communism) which impacted the “totality” of society, impinging with their ideological narratives on every aspect of daily life and centralising power in the hands of a single party.

Transsexual and transgender: “Transsexual” describes those individuals who identify with a gender other than their biological sex and who might undergo gender reassignment surgery. Transgender, on the other hand, indicates a person who does not recognise the “man-woman” gender binarism and whose identity goes beyond (*trans*) gender. However, in

the psychological, medical and legal sphere, the term “transgender” is used to indicate a transgender person who has not undergone sex reassignment.

Transhumanism: the belief or theory that, through the use of scientific discoveries (especially in the field of genetics), the human condition can be improved, both by expanding our physical and cognitive abilities, and by eliminating harmful and unwanted elements linked to the human nature, primarily diseases and aging.

Tyranny: in Ancient Greece, “tyrants” were the rulers who achieved and exercised power in a despotic and violent manner – yet back then the term didn’t necessarily come with the negative connotation it has today.

Universal suffrage: an electoral system where every citizen over a certain age has the right to vote, with no exceptions based on gender, class, census, etc. “Universal suffrage” is opposed to a “restricted” system where only certain citizens can vote, based on biological traits or class membership.

Universalism/Communitarianism: in political philosophy, “Universalism” (or “Cosmopolitanism”) is the doctrine that posits the individual as the atom of society, in all his/her autonomy and capacity of self-determination. Universalism grants equal dignity and equal rights to each individual as an individual – regardless of other biological, cultural, religious differences. Communitarian theories, characterised by their open opposition to universalist individualism, consider it essential to construct and manage society based on the minimal unit of pre-existing political, religious and cultural communities – communities that individuals are born and operate into, and to which they are bound by a strong and

unbreakable membership.

Utopia: Literally, “not place”, from the Greek ou (not) and topos (place), it indicates an ideal place that does not exist. The term was coined by the philosopher Thomas More in 1516. In general, the adjective “utopian” indicates (either negatively or positively) an ideal and perfect condition that humanity should strive to achieve in its path to social and political improvement.

Appendix: *The Amsterdam Declaration 2002*

In 1952, the first World Humanist Congress was held in Amsterdam. Hundreds of activists from all over the world gathered in the Dutch capital with two very specific objectives: 1) to establish an international organisation bringing together all the activists and humanist organizations of the world; 2) to spell out the values and objectives of humanism.

That organisation, today operating under the name Humanists International, at the time of its establishment was called IHEU – International Humanist and Ethical Union.

The text containing the values and objectives of humanism goes by the name of *Amsterdam Declaration*, after the city where it was ratified.

The *Amsterdam Declaration* was written and signed-off in 1952, in the midst of the Cold War, an era of social and technological upheavals that would soon radically change human life. In 2002, hundreds of humanists from all over the world gathered again in Amsterdam to revise the Declaration and bring it up to date, proving once again that for humanists there are no dogmas or sacred and immutable texts, and that humanism is a work in progress, always open to evolution and change.

Eighteen years on, members of humanist circles are already debating whether a new update of the *Amsterdam Declaration* is in order – perhaps in 2022, to mark the 70th anniversary of Humanists International? We'll see. In the meantime, we strongly advise to add Amsterdam to your travel bucket list...

And as we wait for a new and improved *Amsterdam Declaration*, you can appreciate the 2002 version, here appended, which, despite its limits, remains a formidable example of humanist synthesis and clarity.

The text of the *Amsterdam Declaration 2002*

Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world's great thinkers and creative artists and gave rise to science itself.

The fundamentals of modern humanism are as follows:

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 develop-

ment 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 recognises 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 worldviews on all of humanity. Humanism recognises 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 recognises the transforming power of art. Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

7. Humanism is a lifeway aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment 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.

Our primary task is to make human beings aware in the simplest terms of what humanism can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilising free inquiry, the power of sci-

ence and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour.

IHEU Congress 2002

“How often have you heard people say that, in order to be a good person, one must necessarily have faith in a transcendent, supernatural entity? *Good without God* sets out to challenge precisely this assumption.

How? By showing that an alternative to religious morality does in fact exist: it’s called humanism, a radically atheist and at once ethically-oriented philosophy advocating a set of clear, coherent and positive values – from individual dignity to freedom of thought, touching upon science, reason and democracy.

Good Without God is a short, illustrated journey in 11 steps, tailored to 13- to 15-year-old girls and boys first dealing with their doubts about God and religion. Because still to this day, when teenagers begin to explore the possibility of atheism, they are often confronted with the hackneyed rhetorical question: “If you don’t believe in God, then what do you believe in?”

