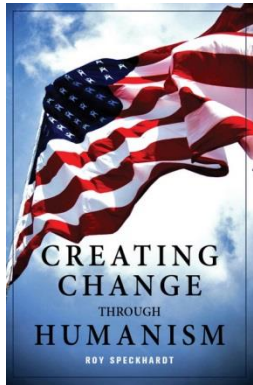


Good Without God



Creating Change Through Humanism

By Roy Speckhardt

Published July 28, 2015

By Humanist Press

Pages 192

ISBN 978-0-931779-65-7

Review by: Leland R. Beaumont

This handbook for prospective humanists is an important resource for thoughtful people who are seeking *real good*. The book tells us what humanism is, why it makes sense, how it addresses real problems, and what we can do to create positive change.

American Humanist Association Executive director, Roy Speckhardt, declares “Humanism is the radical idea that you can be good without a belief in god” and goes on to demonstrate why this simple idea is so sensible and so powerful. Those who will enjoy this book are readers who prefer: science over dogma, common sense over obsolete texts, reality over mysticism, exploration over obedience, coherence over dissonance, inclusion over exclusion, evidence over ideology, and real humans over imagined deities.

The design of this book accommodates a wide range of readers’ readiness to accept and promote humanism. People new to humanism are provided a thorough and accessible introduction to the principles, philosophy, and application of this lifestance. Readers who may have already identified as humanists now have a comprehensive account of it. Experienced humanists who wish to advocate for their beliefs are provided with resources for taking action and creating change.

The second chapter begins with the author’s personal story of growing up Catholic, questioning dogma as a youngster, learning that many bible stories originated as pagan traditions, studying social ills rooted in ignorance, and starting his own progressive thinking website before joining the humanist movement. The chapter continues with the powerful stories of Dr. Anthony Pinn, and Dr. Janet Jeppson Asimov who describe their personal struggles to cross the Theistic divide and embrace Humanism.

Whereas religious beliefs are taught to us, chapter three describes a natural and innate basis for humanism. Research demonstrates that even very young children have a good sense of morality. Our reliance on careful analysis of the observable world is our most reliable source of knowledge not only within, but also beyond the bounds of scientific disciplines. Accepting the scientific process as the best method for determining all types of knowledge allows us to continue to build humanity’s knowledge

base. Because empathy allows us to understand others' feelings, it informs our reasoning toward doing the right thing.

Chapter 4 provides a history of the American Humanist Association, and chapter 5 describes the many very real prejudices against atheists. While these chapters are necessary for completeness, I found them a bit tedious primarily because they look back rather than move forward.

Humanism is marked by its positive approach, and chapter 6 provides an inspiring vision of a bright future that can be attained by applying the principles of Humanism. Many prejudices based on ignorance and sustained by religious fundamentalist will be overcome. "People will understand that science is a way to seek answers, not something to 'believe' in." Future political leaders will position their belief systems in humanistic terms. "Humanists will encourage empathy, along with the compassion and a sense of inherent equal worth that flows from it, in a way that honors human knowledge about ourselves and our universe." These ideas can become unifying forces.

Part II of the book applies the philosophical foundations of humanism to solving problems. These principles are described fully in the appendix *Humanism and its Aspirations*, and explored in chapter 7. Core humanist issues are explored in chapter 8. Here the contentious issues of civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, environment and population dynamics, church-state separation, death with dignity, and responsible scientific freedom are each analyzed from a humanist perspective. Clear thinking supports clear positions on each issue. Chapter 9 advises readers how to live as a humanist. Advice from a humanist perspective is provided on essential life issues, including: origin stories, family life, personal fulfillment, joy, free-will, death, and immortality. Chapter 10 is a guidebook for activism in politics, charity, social change, community, and advising young people. The final chapter strengthens the call to action, encouraging us to: "come out as humanists at every opportunity," explain humanism to others, frame humanist positions in positive language, seek and mobilize allies, and raise public awareness.

The appendix includes three useful references: the third *Humanist Manifesto* describes the concepts and boundaries of humanism, the *Ten Commitments* provide guiding principles for teaching values, and a glossary defines several movement terms.

Although the basis of humanist philosophy is inherently universal and inclusive, this book addresses US-based readers. A bibliography provides useful references for further study, yet claims made throughout the book are not linked to supporting citations. The review copy lacks an index.

Start where you are, read this book, decide for yourself what you believe, and move forward. The book is thoughtfully conceived, well written, clearly argued, and backed by reliable evidence.