

jetztHumanismus

Magazine

“Friends of HUMANISM”

**No Future?
Not on Our
Watch!**
World Humanist Day



HVD

Humanistischer Verband
Deutschlands | Berlin-Brandenburg

The Friends of HUMANISM (Die Freund*innen des HUMANISMUS) support the goals of the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg as members, sponsoring members, donors, volunteers or network partners. They all take on social responsibility in order to strengthen a culture based on freedom and human rights.

The Friends' Circle is committed to a tolerant way of life – for free development together with social responsibility. The **Friends of HUMANISM** share the conviction that we as individuals alone shape our our world living together, cultivating humanity and staying committed to a more humane world.

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Don't miss out

Stay up to date by subscribing to the newsletter of the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg, delivering the latest every month!



Dear Friends of HUMANISM,

June 21 is World Humanist Day! At the same time, we're celebrating 40 years of teaching humanist life skills in Berlin's schools. Two special occasions for us to take a look at humanism worldwide and to celebrate under the slogan

“No Future? Not on Our Watch!”

together with our international friends from the worlds of politics, science and culture. We are delighted to bring so many intelligent and exciting personalities to this event: Chief Executive of Humanists International Andrew Copson, political economist Maja Göpel, philosopher Julian Nida-Rümelin and perhaps the world's most famous forensic biologist: Mark Benecke – they will all be joining us on World Humanists Day in Berlin and as guest authors in this issue of the magazine.

Together with our renowned guests, we talk about the future of global humanism, looking at threats to democracy around the world, our responsibility as humanists and how to engage with artificial intelligence. We will discuss challenges in children's and youth work, the topics of saying farewell and the finite nature of life as well as asking ourselves what we can do together to preserve our environment.

Join us in hearing the thoughts and inspirations of our authors and come celebrate World Humanist Day with us on June 21, 2024, in Berlin.

[We hope you enjoy our anniversary issue!](#)

Sincerely,
Friends of the
Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg

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Enabling the future



Dear fellow humanists,

In this issue, we are delighted to welcome a number of great contributions from prominent academics, humanists and exciting personalities celebrating World Humanist Day with us as part of the “No Future? Not on Our Watch!” congress. Those who have been with us for a long time may be wondering: “what do they actually do there?” “Why such a big event now while we have to fight for every Euro in these times of tight state coffers?” “Are the decision-makers suffering from delusions of grandeur?”

The Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg (Humanistische Verband Berlin-Brandenburg) has been a many-decade success story. Growing year on year, we are a recognised player in Berlin and Brandenburg. This decade, we have realised many goals that our members have long dreamed of: from the opening this past year of the Humanist Education Centre (Humanistischer Bildungscampus) in September, settling on a location of the first Humanist primary school in the region, or the founding of the Humanistic University Berlin (Humanistische Hochschule Berlin), the first of its kind in Germany. We unite over 70 different organisations, over 1400 employees and over 14,000 members under one roof.

My colleague Brigitte has known the Humanist Association for a long time, with her first job being with in the 1990s. There, in a very personal atmosphere, she was able to do real development work as part of a small, committed team and witness the important growth phase of the post-reunification period. Brigitte

was instrumental in the success and growth of the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg. She finds all this somehow quite ‘normal’ and not worth mentioning. We have many ‘Brigittes’ in our association: colleagues who have made an important contribution to organising practical humanism in many different fields on a daily basis for many decades. Many people in Berlin and Brandenburg are familiar with our humanist life lessons, humanist day care centre or one of the numerous counselling, health or youth facilities. If you then ask whether they know about our association, they sometimes answer ‘no’ and regret only having learned about us.

I felt the same way in 2013, the year I first came across the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg: I had not previously heard of them and so was happy to finally find a place that has become a community of values and, in a way, a home for me. A place where I met so many interesting people, with whom I discussed and worked together on different challenges, and where I found much determination to bring more practical humanism into the world. And that is exactly what we continue to strive for: it has never been more important to get the message of peaceful, tolerant and responsible coexistence out into the world more loudly and prominently: the political situation in Germany and the attacks on our democracy from the right put us in a stronger position than ever before to be heard and to take responsibility. And not out of a reaction to ‘market’ ourselves, but out of a deeply felt responsibility and from the knowledge of our creative and innovative power. Right now, we are in need of

ideas for a future worth living. These do not emerge in ivory towers but are the result of people exchanging thoughts, of those who want a different tomorrow networking today, developing ideas and launching projects for the future. World Humanist Day 2024 will provide this stage and opportunity, it will send a signal to the city that we are MANY and that we have the desire and the ability to shape the future.

Last week, Brigitte and I had a coffee together again: sometimes she can hardly believe how big we’ve become. A lot has changed in the last few decades and it has sometimes been challenging to keep up with the growth and developments. But she is also happy and proud of the fruits of her early commitment.

Dear Humanists, on the occasion of World Humanist Day, let us celebrate what we have achieved but also continue to work to actively shape the future because as Antoine de Saint-Exupery stated, “As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.”

Sincerely yours,
Katrin Raczynski

Katrin Raczynski

is Chairwoman of the Board and has led the HVD Berlin-Brandenburg since 2013. She is also a Board member of the HVD Federal Association.



Maja Göpel

We're speaking with Maja Göpel about transformation research, the drivers of planetary change and humanistic education as a motivator for respectful structural change.

♥ Mrs Göpel, what is immediately apparent about your work is that you are incredibly active. You engage with the big questions: climate change, justice and various themes about our future. You are a political economist, expert in sustainability policy and transformation research, author, speaker, consultant, university lecturer, co-founder of Scientists4Future and founder of Mission Wertvoll. One part of them seems to stand out although it also sounds a little complicated: What does a transformation researcher do?

The term transformation actually sums it up quite well: the form changes. This brings us to the structures in which a society organizes itself. Looking back at our history, we have rarely seen changes on the scale of today.

At present, we need to simultaneously reorganize many aspects of society in harmony with one another in a targeted manner. From energy supplies to communication spaces, together with a wide range of institutions from politics and business, we are developing future-oriented perspectives on a scientific basis.

♥ Does this mean that transformation research is not just about climate or environmental policy, but is rather interdisciplinary? That it stands for social change in principle, so to speak?

Exactly: we look at social change. We ask about the drivers of change and also about the possibilities to shape it. Ideally, we can bring this together in a form that is positively oriented towards the future. We know from the past that waiting too long means that the crises can no longer be stopped and we can only act reactively. So, we use this knowledge and show that we can only protect ourselves from irreparable damage by acting early and finding alternatives at an early stage. One very important thing we've learned from research on planetary boundaries is that we need to act now: Develop alternatives, organize circular economies and rebuild the soil now so that we are not faced with the first failed harvests in the immediate future.

♥ These are ecological issues. And what are the other key areas of transformation?

I see three:

- We talk a lot about megatrends these days. One of the most important trends is the growth of multipolar power relations, which are shaking up the familiar global economic structure. For a long time, the USA was seen as the central power based on the world order developed around the UN Charter. This understanding has begun to falter.
- The question of what we do with up to ten billion people. We now have eight. If we are honest, the

number of people on earth is our greatest challenge and a key driver of ecological problems. And this inevitably leads to the question: How big can the “ecological footprint” of a single person on this planet be?

— The phasing out of fossil fuels.

And in all three areas, the keyword is increasing prosperity: since the 1950s, we have fought malnutrition worldwide and developed infrastructure in many countries. But these efforts overshot their mark and the ecological costs of each successive improvement were higher than the positive added value. The movement is out of balance. That’s why the important thing in transformation processes is to look early and learn! We are constantly developing new technologies, materials, and production possibilities, and we see that we can do these things even better than before. Our idea of progress should look at real needs and, with the involvement of science, pursue the fulfilment of goals with the least amount of destruction. And that’s exactly what the design principle for a progress story should look like. Why do we have to behave so ruthlessly – just because we can? Why don’t we follow the value creation process, i.e. how much ecological destruction is still respectful? Can’t we measure the tasks with the question: “How can I solve this in the best possible way?”

♥ **This is a huge topic and you deal with it both as a scientist and as a political activist. Doesn’t that clash: science with its rather slow, deliberate, sceptical processes and political activism, which needs a clear message and which shouldn’t be met with doubt or scepticism?**

No, I don’t think they clash at all. On the contrary, I have organized my entire career in this way. I choose my research based on the topics I want to understand. I want to apply the knowledge I gain and then I become active. And that’s how it always develops: learning, understanding, actively applying. Officially, this usually doesn’t work out, but this is why transformation research has been such a great fit for me: it says that such an approach is exactly what we need: transdisciplinary work.

♥ **Applied knowledge is also at the centre of humanistic education. Do you see a connection to humanistic values in your work?**

I feel very much at home with the thinkers embedded in humanism and I find it incredibly important to uphold this positive image of humanity. Learning, moving forward, progressing. This is what humanistic education stands for. Let’s look at this from a sporting perspective. “Competition”: com means “with”, i.e. not in the form of competition and repression, but rather together. That is the essence, a humanistic and learning-oriented aspect that tells us that you can let go without it meaning failure. And also not that if I am right, you are automatically wrong. Even in evolutionary terms, that would be complete nonsense.

♥ **I see you here today, and also in your publications, as mostly cheery. How do you manage to stay positive despite all your daily challenges?**

Firstly, the topic of justice strongly moves me and gives me enormous strength to keep going. I call it my “this-must-not-be-allowed-to-happen” drive. At the same time, I get a lot of positive feedback on my work. The subtitle of my book *Rethinking our World* is an invitation. This invitation has brought me an incredible amount of positive feedback: “Invitation accepted” was the most frequent response I received. That’s so great and I think this feedback loop gives me the strength to carry on cheerfully.

♥ **It seems to me that we are riding a similar wave. Joachim Kahl’s latest book *Humanismus: eine Einladung* (Humanism: An Invitation) takes the same approach. Well, thank you very much for this interview! Let’s continue to invite people to think and exchange ideas together.**

Professor Dr Maja Göpel

has been working for 25 years as a political economist, transformation expert and sustainability researcher, political consultant and bestselling author, always at the interface of science, politics and society. With a degree in media economics and a doctorate in political economics, she is a member of the Club of Rome, the World Future Council, the Balaton Group, co-founder of the Scientists4Future initiative and founder of Mission Wertvoll. The interview was conducted by Professor Dr Ralf Schöppner from Humanistic University Berlin.

The interview was conducted by **Professor Dr Ralf Schöppner** from Humanistic University Berlin.

One humanity

How two ideas became
the starting point for
a humane future



“The world is my country.” Thomas Paine

The year 1948 was paradigmatic. Unexpected humanity, for everyone. And yet being human was not very popular during the murderous years of the Second World War; it felt like the great inferno was only moments earlier. It was a difficult time, marked by an intensive search after what could sustain us in the aftermath of such a historical episode in which the ground had disappeared from under our feet faster than we could say the word “human”.

It was precisely at this time that the United Nations General Assembly set about drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The motivation: the cross-cultural, age-old idea of one humanity in which no one would have to fear for their lives in the face of national, ethnic or social boundaries. Universal humanity was promoted by passionate human rights activists such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and Julian Huxley, Director-General of UNESCO.

New movement on an age-old idea

But before this could happen, unexpected guests from the “World Citizens Movement” occupied the United Nations meeting place in Paris. They read out a declaration, “We, the people, want the peace that only a world government can provide.” This civil protest action was supported by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Einstein, among others. It quickly attracted worldwide interest, gaining an increasing number of supporters, and left an impression on the delegates at the UN Assembly. Previous differences retreated into the background. And so, on 10 December 1948, without any dissenting votes, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, and with it, a new humanism that promised freedom for all humankind.

A new humanism, which breathes freedom

Since that moment, the following has applied: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights [...] without distinction of any kind, such as race [which we might now refer to as “ethnicity”], colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Human rights also encompass a wide range of individual rights, including the right to life, freedom of expression, equality before the law and the right to education.

However, there is still a long way to go to achieve global citizenship. Human rights violations take place in many parts of the world, in the form of state oppression, violent conflicts, racism and discrimination based on ethnic or social origin, religion or sexual orientation. Overcoming nation-state self-interest and other causes of inhumanity thus seems more urgent than ever. The idea of global citizenship and universal human rights is the humanist antidote worth fighting for. A future without these is no future at all.

Christian Lisker

is a practical humanism consultant at the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg.

How it began

From humble beginnings, our humanistic life skills lessons (Lebenskundeunterricht) have developed into an important pillar of value-oriented education in Berlin and Brandenburg. Over the past 40 years, more than 400,000 pupils have taken part: A good opportunity to look back.



Pupils at a Kreuzberg school make cranes as peace symbols in life skills lessons to mark World Humanist Day 2023 under the motto "Longing for peace".

“We couldn’t have imagined this 40 years ago,” says Ulrich Tünsmeier. As one of the first life skills teachers, he was involved in the early days of the project. “We could never have imagined that we would now be offering the most popular worldview subject in Berlin schools, given to over 72,000 pupils every year.”

40 years ago, the 1980s, Berlin was still divided. In West Berlin, a handful of convinced freethinkers set out to anchor their idea of humanist education in schools as an alternative to religious education. They were inspired by the educational reform ideas of the 1920s and the social demands of the time. “We had to convince the schools to offer the subject and the Berlin Senate to recognize and fund it. The efforts paid off when a two-year pilot project was launched in the 1982/83 school year,” recalls Ulrich Tünsmeier. In 1984, regular lessons began at the Theodor Storm Primary School in Neukölln.

At first, humanistic life skills was a niche subject. However, it’s not only developed in terms of popularity but also in terms of content and didactic methods. In the beginning, there was hardly any teaching material, which necessitated a lot of improvisation, notes Tünsmeier. “Today it’s different; there is a lot of material, even a textbook.”

Humanistic education means putting people at the centre and promoting values such as compassion and appreciation. Over time, early humanistic postulates have been integrated into general statements of a humanistic worldview. The postulates – on nature, connectedness, equality, freedom, reason and worldliness – form the backbone of humanist education. They encourage the exploration of human nature, promote empathy and a sense of community and emphasize the importance of freedom and reason in thought and action.

At a time of social challenges and global crises, humanistic education is gaining in importance. It enables pupils to reflect critically, act empathetically and take responsibility for themselves and their fellow human beings. All of the almost 400 full-time life skills teachers are convinced that humanistic life skills are

an indispensable part of a skills- and strength-oriented education that aims to promote humanity in all its facets. In the coming decades, it will continue to support young people in participating in our society in a manner defined by self-determination and responsibility. And despite all the changes over the last 40 years, Ulrich Tünsmeier sees one important constant: “Children are always glad to come to our life skills lessons.”

Agnieszka Zyluk

has been the Head of Teacher Training of the Humanistic Life Skills program since April 2023. Previously, she set up a non-profit initiative that allows children to gain their first insights into potential careers.



The evolution of global humanism

Andrew Copson takes us into the historical and contemporary landscapes of global humanism. He highlights the challenges of today. But also the many advances that are definitely worth celebrating World Humanist Day together and looking positively to the future.



There are of course differences in the development of humanism in the global North and the global South. The global North has some extremely old humanist organisations and a very well documented history. We can look back and know where these movements came from by people's writing, thoughts, and institutional records, starting with Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries talking openly about abandoning belief in gods entirely. Many different factors contributed to this change, including a rediscovery and an active promulgation of texts from pre-Christian Europe, the increasing success of natural scientists in understanding the universe and putting forward accurate and reliable explanations of how nature behave and, with growing material comfort, more time for people to think about worldly things rather than being on the breadline all the time. Out of all these tributaries came this new humanist tradition. We start to see organisations set up to fortify people with these beliefs and spread these beliefs through education and agitation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Today the humanist movement has moved beyond the global North and is truly a global one, with members and associates from across the world, from Malaysia to Mexico, Ghana to Guatemala, and Barbados to Myanmar. We have organisations now springing up or people forming organisations where we would never have thought that would have been the case, particularly in the Arab world and Southeast Asia. Increasing global connectivity, especially through the medium of the English language and the internet, are leading to humanist ideas being transferred and discussed much more rapidly than in previous times. This is even in countries where the political and social context is very hostile.

There is however an incredibly diverse set of challenges facing humanist groups around the world. Common themes are great economic difficulties – the global North is now also not in tip-top condition economically, so its support of humanist organisations in the South by way of grant funding (which has been quite strongly relied on until now) risks diminishing. And everyone is aware that global religious, especially North American Christian – White Christian Nati-

onalist – money is flowing into the global South to fight their proxy wars, whether against LGBT rights or women's rights to reproductive rights and sexual health, and non-Christians' freedom. These fledgling organisations, largely reliant on young people who have their own lives, careers, and families, don't always have the resources behind them to reach their full potential. It's in these countries, where humanist organisations are yet not fully realised, that people are still being assassinated for being humanists and rationalists, activists, in villages and elsewhere. I am constantly surprised by the extent to which there is such widespread, low-level harassment of humanists too. I think of a country like India where there are silly petty things: problems in getting your passport, being deplaned at regional airports, just because someone knows you are a rationalist or a humanist activist, and wants to give you a bit of bother.

At the same time however, there are incredible stories of people overcoming all of those things. In the South, you just have to work harder to sustain humanist organisations. It provides great challenges and inspirational stories, of course, many of which I see as President of Humanists International. In the North, humanist organisations are continuing to flourish including in Germany and the UK and punch well above their weight with regards their political influence. Despite the challenges we face, we have much to celebrate and be optimistic about this World Humanist Day.

Andrew Copson

has been Chief Executive of Humanists UK since 2009 and is currently serving his final term as President of Humanists International, which office he has held since 2015. He is the author of *Secularism: a very short introduction* and, with Alice Roberts, of the Sunday Times Bestseller *The Little Book of Humanism*.



#ZUSAMMEN- LAND – Diversity makes us strong

There is great fear of the rising tide of right-wing radicalism. However, Bruno Osuch believes that there are good reasons for optimism: social cohesion is greater than we had expected.



Many in Germany are afraid of the recent increase in right-wing radicalism – and rightly so. Polls covering the upcoming elections do not bode well, with forecasts putting the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) at 30% or more. This is indeed frightening. However, the glass is not half empty but half full, and it continues to fill up. What do I mean by that?

After the German public became aware of the outrageous and dangerous ideas surrounding the “master plan for remigration” presented at a meeting held in a Potsdam villa in November 2023, a unique wave of protests swept across Germany. People took to the streets to publicly and loudly stand up for cohesion, democracy and diversity, even in small towns like Lübben in the Spreewald. For the first time, alliances extended beyond previous anti-fascist, i.e. mostly left-wing, circles. In many places, conservatives also joined in. It was an outcry from the centre of society. Never before in our history has there been such a broad social consensus against the right. And the AfD’s poll ratings promptly fell by several percentage points.

What does that tell us? If the democratic forces in our country stand together and take a proactive and self-confident stance, we can stop the rise of the neo-Nazis, the racists and those that want to divide us.

The big difference to 1933

The danger of 1933, when the Nazis took power in Germany, repeating itself is often evoked. However, there are several crucial differences: Firstly, today we have a stable, democratic state. For a long time, parts of it were blind to the right, as the years of murderous activities of the National Socialist Underground (Nationalsozialistischen Untergrundes, NSU) have shown. At times, right-wing extremist networks were found right up to the highest security authorities, such as in the Special Forces Command (Kommando Spezialkräften, KSK) of the German Armed Forces, where an entire company had to be disbanded as a result. Right-wing chat groups are still present in the police forces.

But the state is no longer hesitant, rather it is beginning to fight back with all means at its disposal.

Additionally, all major German economic actors have recognized that the realization of German nationalist and völkisch fantasies would cause serious damage to our country, even destroying its economic foundations as an export nation – in stark contrast to 1933, when major German corporations such as Thyssen financed Hitler’s lavish election campaigns. For months, major well-known German corporations and companies have published full-page advertisements in German newspapers almost weekly under the title #ZUSAMMENLAND. Vielfalt macht uns stark (roughly, “#ACOUNTRYUNITED – Diversity Makes Us Strong”). The accompanying text reads “We have learned from history and have not forgotten how inhumanity – at first secretly and cautiously, then oppressively and brutally – penetrated society. [...] So, this year counts: Against hatred and division. For a new togetherness. Strong together in a diverse #Zusammenland”. This business campaign demonstrates the country’s growing cohesion and our international responsibility.

Dr Bruno Osuch

was previously President of the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg for many years. He is currently responsible for the association’s political communication.

Beyond euphoria and apocalypse

Julian Nida-Rümelin calls for digital humanism in the face of current challenges posed by digitalization and artificial intelligence.

In the distant future, we may look back on human history and speak of three major disruptive technological innovations: The Neolithic transition from hunter-gatherer to sedentary agricultural culture, the 19th century transition to the Industrial Age based on fossil fuels and finally the 21st century digital revolution with artificial intelligence. If this will come to pass, then we are only at the beginning of the current technological revolution, similar to Europe in the first decades of the 19th century. Just like back then, current technological innovations have been accompanied by both apocalyptic fears and euphoric expectations. The latter are part of the 'Silicon Valley ideology,' according to which comprehensive digitalisation will pave the way to a utopian world in which transparency and predictability will save us from all the evils of this world.

Digital humanism provides a counterpoint: because it trusts human reason, it sets itself apart from those prophesizing apocalypse, and because it recognises the limits of digital technology, it sets itself apart from the euphoric utopians. Digital humanism does not seek to transform people into machines nor does it interpret machines as people. It advocates for an instrumental attitude towards digital technologies and rejects widespread mystifying beliefs of AI animism that software systems are intelligent, can perceive, or even have emotions, or that they can recognise and make decisions. We should be wary of the self-deception that takes place as we first develop digital machines simulating emotions, insights and decisions, only to be surprised to find that these machines only give the impression of having emotions or being capable of recognising and making decisions.

Digital humanism is not defensive: it does not want to slow down technological progress in the age of artificial intelligence but rather promote it. It is in favour of accelerating human progress by using digital technologies to make our lives richer, more efficient and more sustainable. It does not dream of a completely new form of human existence, like the transhumanists, but is optimistic about the digital potential in human creative power. We humans alone are responsible for ensuring that the political and legal framework of digitalisation ensures humane progress and does not create additional dependencies, discrimination and fears.

Professor Dr Julian Nida-Rümelin

is a philosopher, Deputy Chairman of the German Ethics Council (Deutscher Ethikrat) and Founding Rector of the Humanist University Berlin (Humanistische Hochschule Berlin). Until 2020, he held the Chair of Philosophy and Political Theory at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich and was previously Head of Cultural Affairs for the City of Munich as well as Minister of Culture in the First Schröder cabinet. Relevant books include "Philosophie humaner Bildung", "Humanistische Reflexionen", "Per un nuovo umanesimo cosmopolitico", "Digitaler Humanismus" and "Eine Theorie praktischer Vernunft".



Thank you
for your donation

Our JuKuZ – youth art and cultural centre – in Treptow, Berlin – youth culture for everyone!

A year ago, we expanded the focus of the Gérard Philippe Youth Art and Cultural and are now the third Berlin-wide youth leisure facility to offer queer-centred activities, focusing on LGBTQIA* teenagers and young adults and offering topic-specific projects and safe groups. At the same time, we create public spaces for interdisciplinary interactions in order to open up and reflect on queer-feminist perspectives.

Six days a week, the centre offers different cultural activities and education, including painting, woodworking, the opportunity to create music on the drums, guitar or piano and even theatre workshops: teens have the change to try out new skills and perhaps even perform in the centre's event hall.

Our thanks go to all supporters who have made the JuKuZ and its further development possible!



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“No Future? Not on Our Watch!”

Help support our wide range of work!

The Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg is active in the areas of practical life support, education and culture. With around 1,400 full-time employees and just as many volunteers, we offer support, advice and help in over 70 different social projects and programmes, regardless of ethnic origin, nationality, age, sexual orientation or worldview:

- We are involved in public child and youth work at 26 daycare centres and two family centres. In addition to our own educational institutions, we have offered our Humanist Life Skills programme in Berlin public schools for forty years.
- With our youth celebrations, young humanists say goodbye to their childhood and welcome the beginning of a new phase of their lives together with family and friends. This symbolic step into adulthood is one of the highlights of many thousands of our Humanists every year.
- We offer numerous health and social services, from pregnancy conflict counselling to a senior citizens' office with daily changing offers. We also assist with arranging preventive care and offer counselling on living wills.
- As part of our hospice work, we empower those dealing with seriously ill loved ones, including helping them saying goodbye and supporting them in difficult times.

We're happy to see that our offers are resonating and the demand for our services is growing. Please consider supporting us so that we can continue to provide assistance. Our humanist services in Berlin and Brandenburg help to promote democracy and social cohesion: Our commitment provides a strong counterweight to the global shift to the right, which very often goes hand in hand with inhuman ideologies. We stand in firm opposition to any and all violations of human rights.

Please donate so that we can remain strong!

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Foto: Daniel Hammelstein

Mark Benecke

Conversation with Mark Benecke, who is offering a workshop on the topic of death on World Humanist Day, June 21, 2024.

♥ Dear Mark, given your experience and your immense wealth of knowledge as a forensic biologist, it seems you have a special relationship to death and ways of dying; one that is perhaps very close to secular humanism. What would you say about that?

You can perhaps judge better than I can. For me, death is a part of the cycle of life, or more precisely, the composition of substances. Sometimes, I am “composed” as a human being and sometimes the components are used elsewhere: in trees, flowers, stones, water, wind and insects. Even in the course of what we consider to be our lifetime, substances enter and leave us all the time: dynamic equilibrium as it’s referred to in biology.

♥ Do you think there is a good way to deal with death using humour?

Why not? As long as someone had a full life, fine! I don’t find it humorous to laugh about serious actual misfortunes.

♥ Last year, the Humboldt Forum in Berlin hosted an exhibition entitled “in_finite. Living with Death” (“un_endlich. Leben mit dem Tod“). There death was presented exclusively from a religious or medical perspective. Your voice also accompanied the program from a scientific perspective. Were you surprised that no secular viewpoint was represented?

I actually found my view secular: in the tent where my voice was heard, I described the decomposition of corpses by insects. In addition, in the exhibition booths, the slow shutdown of the body as it dies naturally through ageing was described matter-of-factly. I wouldn’t describe either of these as medical but as biological.

♥ Whether in the context of our humanistic hospice work or in humanistic life skills lessons, our daily work always deals with questions of life and death in educational terms. We still see this as a taboo topic however, or at least as one that is somewhat repressed. In your opinion, how can we change society’s view of death and dying and make it less painful? Talk to dying people more often. There are so many people in retirement or nursing homes and often also in hospices who are happy to receive visitors. The rest will happen by itself.

♥ Would you share with us a humanistic educational adage?

Live and let live

(“Jeck loss Jeck”, a phrase in Cologne, Germany)

♥ Dear Mark, thank you for your time and for your input!

Thank you for making the world clearer and more reasonable.

Dipl.-Biol. Dr rer. medic., M.Sc., Ph.D. Mark Benecke

The Cologne-based forensic biologist has been internationally active in the field of forensic sciences for over 30 years, with a particular focus on insects, blood and genetic material. After completing his doctorate at the Institute of Forensic Medicine at the University of Cologne, he completed various specialist training courses around the world, such as with the FBI. As Germany’s only publicly appointed and sworn expert for biological evidence, he has examined Adolf Hitler’s skull among other objects and most recently the lampshades from the concentration camp Buchenwald. He has published numerous scientific articles and non-fiction and children’s books, as well as developing science kits. Given his expertise in numerous fields, immerse yourself in Mark Benecke’s specialist knowledge and multifaceted work at www.benecke.com

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Start:

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JULIAN NIDA-RÜMELIN is the Deputy Chairman for the German Ethics Council and he held the chair for philosophy and political theory at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich until 2020. Nida-Rümelin also served as Cultural Advisor for the state capital of Munich and on a federal level as Minister of State for Culture.

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„Can people be good without God? Can a moral orientation be sustained and developed outside of a religious context? The answer to both of these questions is a resounding yes.”

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