

WONDER: A HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

‘Being alive is about more than merely existing. As conscious and creative creatures, we have the capacity to add richness and colour to our lives.’

ALICE ROBERTS, scientist

Some people ask whether the humanist understanding of human beings and the natural world leaves any room for awe and **wonder** and, if so, where this can be found. Many humanists believe the natural world and the human story can be sources of wonder. Science can reveal nature’s hidden beauty – it can enhance rather than diminish our sense of awe. Creativity and the arts can bring us comfort and joy. For humanists, a non-religious life is no less wonderful.

‘Works of art or music, sublime grand spectacles in nature, the starry heavens above and the moral law within, the oldest human skulls in Kenya or the newest human baby in a maternity ward can all be fitting objects of different kinds of awe and reverence. They can all take us outside ourselves.’

SIMON BLACKBURN, humanist philosopher



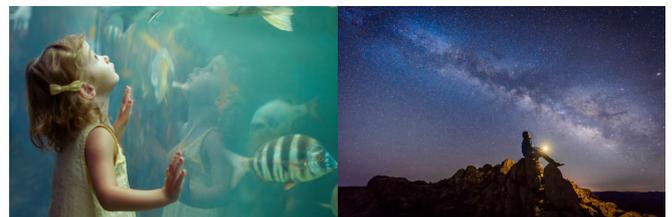
‘Learning about the nature of space and time or the structure of atoms fills me with awe and wonder; it makes me want to learn more. I see a beauty in the laws of nature that can be explained by science.’

JIM AL-KHALILI, physicist



‘It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.’

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH, naturalist



‘SPIRITUALITY’?

Some, but not all, humanists will describe these experiences as **‘spiritual’**. However, the word ‘spiritual’ is not used to imply a connection with anything supernatural. Humanists typically use it to describe a sense of escape from the ordinary, day-to-day matters that might concern us.

‘If anything is to count as ‘spiritual’ for humanists, it has to be a feature of our worldly experience in the here and now. Of course there are any number of experiences which are ‘spiritual’ in that sense, things which ‘lift the spirits’ – the inspiration to be derived from relationships with other people, from the experience of great art, or from the beauty of the natural world.’

RICHARD NORMAN, humanist philosopher