

Still time to do good, at any age

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There are likely very few of us octogenarians who do not pay some attention each birthday and possibly each season to thoughts about our own death.

As humanists, we reflect on whether we have lived our lives in such a manner that we have achieved goals enabling us to help our families, communities, country, and perhaps even our world, to become a little better in our lifetime. Ideally, we have done our best to make this happen.

We realize our days are numbered and each day matters since our lives will not go on forever. If we are lucky enough to have good health, we can expect to live until our late 80s or early 90s.

As humanists, most of the time, we turn our thoughts to living well in the here and now and to achievements we can accomplish in the relatively short time we are alive.

Many religious adherents probably think about death more frequently than do humanists because there is much about religion that encourages believers to live daily in preparation for death and an expected heavenly afterlife.

Along with this belief there is some uncertainty and anxiety about what the afterlife may hold or whether there will be any afterlife. Hence in religion, the importance of faith becomes crucial since a strong faith can help bolster a sustained belief in spite of whatever uncertainty or doubt may threaten to diminish religious convictions about a personal afterlife.

It is possible to be so concerned about the uncertainty of afterlife that some religious believers may overlook the everyday opportunities they have to better their lives. In some cases, hope for an afterlife may take on more importance than the here and now. This is especially true for those who believe the afterlife continues for all eternity.

So what are humanists to do with our short life? We must make the most of each day and each opportunity we have to bring about positive improvements in the here and now.

We should realize that although human life is short, whatever positive things we can do in our life time will continue on in the lives of our children's children and into future generations. Good values, kind actions, care for the environment, appreciation of beautiful art or music, compassion for our fellow humans, respect for the dignity and the needs of those less fortunate, are some of the improvements we believe in.

These are values and achievements that can be carried into the future long after our present life has ceased. Although we don't believe in a personal afterlife, we do believe life will continue on, not in heaven, but in this planet Earth after we die. It will be life in other generations and other environmental conditions and it will continue on as long as new human generations survive into the future.

In that sense we believe in an afterlife but not in a personal afterlife. We believe that the good and the bad in our daily choices will have their own afterlife into the future long after our individual deaths.

Of course, we humanists are not the only people who believe in living good moral and ethical lives in the here and now. Religious adherents also put a high value on honesty, responsibility, caring, sharing and helping others. They also have feelings of gratitude and fulfilment when they pursue the values they believe in. By doing so, they too enrich their lives in the here and now.

It is encouraging when one finds that most of the best morals we live by, whether we are religious or secular, are more or less the same for both groups. We share in a common humanity. Neither the best values in religion nor the best values in humanism should cause either group to be fearful of their counterpart.

There are lots of good deeds and needs to attend to in the present which will carry over into the afterlife of both groups.