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Dear Anthony,

**Take part in our new 'My Mortality' project by providing us with your humanist perspective**

I am writing to invite you, as a humanist, to contribute your perspective on your own mortality for our new project called '**My Mortality**'. The output of this project will be a collection of writings, contributed by humanists, which outlines their thoughts on their own mortality. These will be published on the Humanists UK website to coincide with 'Dying Matters' week (10–16 May). (<https://www.dyingmatters.org/>)

One of life's great challenges is for us to come to terms with our mortality and the prospect of our own death. Few of us talk about this, especially while we are still in good health. Even when our health fails, we may find that relatives and friends quite understandably want only to comfort and reassure us. **The COVID-19 pandemic has, for many of us, made us more aware of our own mortality.**

A collection of these insights and thoughts could provide peace of mind, inspiration, and comfort to others.

Humanists believe that we have only this one life, but we do not have any consensus view of our own mortality. A pilot for this project produced a variety of insights that were comforting, inspirational, and beautifully honest. You can [take a look at some examples](#). These short pieces identified what the writers valued above all else, and included family, friends, and the many other things that have brought them joy. They also identified some preparations the authors have made for the end of their own lives. I therefore expect that this proposed collection will represent that hitherto unspoken aspect of what it means to be a humanist – our view of our mortality.

This collection of perspectives will likely be of interest to people of all ages who want to understand what it means to be a humanist. I also expect that many who read it will find comfort in seeing their own hopes and concerns reflected in the views of others, and to know that they are not alone. One of the unexpected benefits may be to those who find that writing their own entry to 'My Mortality' leads them to confront their unspoken fears of death that, when expressed in words, are invariably diminished. All contributors should find comfort in knowing that their own perspective will help others in coming to terms with their own mortality.

Your perspective should be **no longer than 300 words** and consist only of your thoughts about your own mortality. For many, these thoughts come together when we try to put words to feelings. **The only rule is that you are honest.**

I hope that you will contribute. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

Kind regards,

**A humanist, pastoral carer and school speaker**

## Two responses to the letter of invitation

### **Thoughts About My Own Mortality**

It's been a huge relief to find my home in Humanism. No more myths and legends. Nothing supernatural. No more just going along with what others think, taking the easy way. No more avoiding the big issues. A Damascus Road experience in reverse.

So now, when I come to think of my own mortality, there's no reckoning, no divine judgment, no heaven, no hell, no purgatory, no future, no reuniting, no passing, no better place. Just nothing. The same for every animal.

I will leave a fading, once bright, imprint on others who knew me. Maybe that will last a couple of generations. I hope I'll be remembered fondly. I think I will. I've done my best to achieve that.

That's fine. I'll settle for that.

I've been lucky so far. A good, long, and healthy life. I must make the very most of what's left. I'm unique. No one can do it like me. I've got things to join in. Things I can't join in. Others to think of. Challenges to meet. Experiences to enjoy. Time alone to reflect. People to love. Plenty to think about. Highlights and dark times. That's life. I must get on with it.

#### **Anthony**

I am fortunate that my life has been a happy one. Now retired, my days still fill with simple pleasures: an early breakfast with Lek (my wife), a long walk with my whippet, meeting old friends, and 'projects'. Lek and I treasure the time we spend with our family and grandchildren all of whom live nearby. These pleasures will, I hope, continue for a while, but I am now 71 and getting close to the end of my life. This prospect does not trouble me greatly even though, as a scientist, I discounted long ago any supernatural explanation of life in favour of one based on natural forces, including evolution, genetics, and heredity.

My own genetic make-up, inherited from my parents and theirs, has already been passed to our children and grandchildren in that cycle from birth to birth that bypasses death. I share with those born into my family many characteristics of stature, behaviour, and mind. Although I am saddened to think that my death may cause my family grief, they will surely be comforted as they walk away from the grave that they together represent more of me than is left behind. I find immense comfort in knowing that these same ties of heredity form a network which, over billions of years of evolution, bind us all to life in its various forms, where the whole of humanity are my brothers and sisters, the other animals and the birds are my cousins, and the insects, microbes, plants and others are my distant relatives.

Looking towards my final days, I want to avoid that greatest of all indignities and distress, of declining into a state of mental confusion and helplessness. If that seems likely I have planned a swift end to my own happy life.

#### **John**