

Overview

This overview consists of the first pages of each of the three named sections of *Love, Death, Humanism: Practical Philosophy in Verse*. Each part contains poetic glimpses into these matters of human existence that curious minds have pondered for millennia. You are living a life that no one has lived before. It's now your turn. You're in charge. You love. You will die. What do you believe?

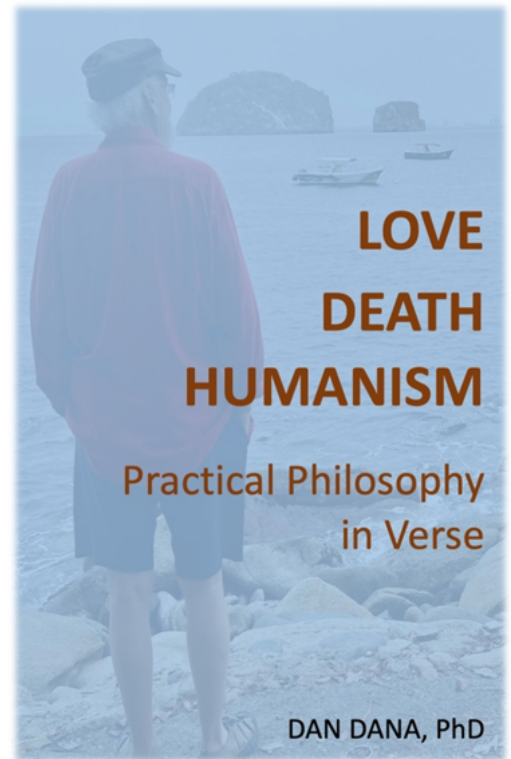
This book is not designed to be read front to back, although habit may impel you to do so. Your attention may be drawn more to one of its three headings than another. Within each, haiku are arranged in no strict order. Some haiku may catch your interest, beckoning to be reread to dwell on its personal significance to you. Others you may find irrelevant to this moment in your life's journey.

Browse

Let your mind wander

Follow it there

Repeat



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LOVE

Plato and Aristotle, astute observers of human nature, gave us language for that ubiquitous set of emotions we loosely call love. Some custom blend of their seven kinds of love (parsed elsewhere) defines our personal relationships today, 2400 years later. Human nature changes slowly.

In the following pages, I humbly employ my own life-partner and primary love object—from 1995 'til-death-do-us-part—as an exemplar. Her name is Susan. She is *my* ideal. *We* are the product of *our* relationship work. Your efforts to find, create, and cultivate love in your own life may produce a quite different result. Bits you encounter here, filtered through your own private lens, may help you find your way or confirm your own choices. If so, my task has been successful.

As you peruse these 29 haiku, Susan will be replaced in your mind's eye by your own love object(s)—perhaps your spouse or other partner, temporary or permanent, living or lost, same sex or other, monogamous or poly, happy or distressed, real or imagined. Let these haiku morph into your own unique living story.

Viewed through a wider lens than just romantic love, some haiku address other forms of affectionate attachment identified by our Greek philosophers. To adapt and repurpose a biblical quote, “Man does not love by romance alone.”

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DEATH

The idea of death becomes an ever more powerful attractor the closer it appears on the uncertain horizon, like a magnet as it nears the opposite pole. I’m pushing eighty. I’m drawn in like a moth to flame, watching warily as I circle its vortex.

This portion of the book contains forty haiku quintets. None are morbid or gruesome. I hope to die peacefully and lucidly. I do not fear actually being dead. Holding an atheistic, non-spiritual worldview, I anticipate no afterlife. I behold in wonder the stark reality before me, that I will die and the world will go on, just as I have gone on after the deaths of my parents, and humanity has gone on for millions of generations of ancient and pre-human ancestors who each died. And, in some post-human sentient form, we will go on until life’s final extinction some five billion years hence as the expanding sun vaporizes our planet. In choosing to live, such is our bargain with fate.

I offer these verses hoping that you, dear mortal reader, may find inspiration, joy in living your awesome finite existence, and wise acceptance of its end.

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HUMANISM

Humanism: A secular worldview whose central concern is the wellbeing of people and other sentient animals. Humanists regard scientific empiricism as the only way to achieve knowledge of objective reality, eschewing religion and other supernaturalistic beliefs.

I have not always been an atheist. Reared on a family farm in the Protestant Christian milieu of the American Midwest, I absorbed the cultural and religious dogma of my community. I had never knowingly met an atheist.

In childhood, as now, I was drawn to existential wonderings about the Big Questions: Who am I? Why am I here? When will I die? What happened before and what comes next? The answers imparted weekly by our country preacher failed to quiet my persistent questioning.

At about age fifteen I met Gary, the visiting teenage grandson of rural neighbors, who gave me a small book by British philosopher Bertrand Russell. Gary was my first atheist. As dogma’s cataracts peeled away, I began to see fresh light. Russell’s clear-eyed rationality upended the blind faith I had inherited.

Leaving the farm for college and the wider world, I was exposed to scientific empiricism—rational inquiry using factual evidence—as an alternative means of knowing. I had thus found a better way to answer my questions than through the muddle of divine revelation and religious authority.

These pages contain 22 poetic glimpses into the secular-humanist worldview that replaced the supernaturalism of my childhood faith. See my 2014 book *The Reason Revolution: Atheism, Secular Humanism, and the Collapse of Religion* for a concise, non-poetic narrative.

I recognize that not every reader will concur with my non-theistic, non-supernaturalist, secular-humanist paradigm. Those who share my wonder about the natural world may find these verses interesting, perhaps confirmatory, even transformative—I refer you to *Ode to Bertrand Russell*, below. Those who are content with a metaphysical faith that involves immaterial entities lying outside the objective universe (deities, afterlife, soul, spirits) may not wish to linger here. Or, you may dare to read boldly on, perhaps answering differently the questions that proved fatal to my adolescent faith.