



Interview with Bob Reuter – President, Allianz von Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker

Posted on [July 5, 2019](#) by [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#)



By [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#)

Bob Reuter is the President of the Allianz von Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker.

Here we talk about his life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Bob Reuter: I was raised in Luxembourg, a small but rich country in the middle of West Europe that has been traditionally roman catholic, multilingual (Luxembourgish, German, French) and multicultural (nowadays around 50% of inhabitants have an immigration background). My dad worked as an engineer for an US American international company and my mom worked at home as a mother and housewife. I did spend my early life in a rural area with my parents and my younger brother. I was raised in the catholic faith, because that was the default position back in the days, and I did develop some interest in the “big questions” about the meaning of life, the universe and everything.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Reuter: My school career was rather “linear”, after primary school I went to secondary school where I took “natural sciences”. During the first year of secondary school I decided to become a (moral & ethical) vegetarian, which brought me to self-educate myself (with the help of books) about nutrition and cooking. At the age of 16 I started to read a rather large anthology about the history of philosophy, which introduced me to a wide range of philosophical and religious positions and perspectives. Later in secondary school I developed quite an appetite for biology and also for theology (and even considered for a short period to study it after secondary school). At the age of 19, after finishing secondary education, I went to study abroad, to Brussels, Belgium. I studied experimental cognitive psychology and later did a PhD in psychology (in the field of consciousness studies). While I was an undergraduate I read a lot of books from a range of subfields of psychology, but also from connected disciplines, like anthropology, evolutionary biology and computer sciences. These readings allowed me to discover atheist authors like Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Daniel Dennett and the likes, allowed me to get rid of my default metaphysical position (the need for a creator god to kickstart the universe, life and consciousness) and allowed to come out (later) as an atheist.

Jacobsen: What is your current position in the Allianz von Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker? What tasks and responsibilities come with the presidency?

Reuter: Since 10th May 2019 I serve as the president of the Luxembourgish Alliance of Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics. Before that I had been a member of the executive board for a few years, serving as the treasurer. My tasks and responsibilities are those of a president of any non-profit association: organize meeting of the executive board; set up a strategy for short- and mid-term actions; design, plan and execute

actions (together with the other members of the executive board); motivate members to participate in our actions; write messages to our members; prepare printed annual reports about our activities; represent our association in the (national) media, etc.

Jacobsen: How does the organization provide a space for community of likeminded individuals?

Reuter: In the past, we have organized some events where likeminded individuals could meet and discuss, like parties, movie screenings, general assemblies followed by a shared drink, talks by invited speakers followed by informal discussions and we have a page on Facebook where people discuss their viewpoints. I recently started to organize “Cafés humanistes”, but not so many people showed up... In the future, we would like to develop more such spaces to grow the Humanists in Luxembourg community, ideally by having a physical place where interested people can come in, explore books and meet people.

Jacobsen: Who have been prominent individuals visiting the Allianz vun Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker or coming out of it?

Reuter: So far, we have mostly hosted speakers from Germany like Michael Schmidt-Salomon and his daughter Lea Salomon, Carsten Frerk, Hamed Abdel-Samad, Philipp Möller, Ulrike von Chossy & Michael Bauer. We had Edwige Chirouter from France present her ideas about how to do philosophy with (young) kids. But we also have had the honor to have Michael Shermer for a world-premiere talk about his book “Heavens on Earth: The Quest for Immortality and Perfectibility.” Recently, we invited Natalie Grams, a medical doctor and public speaker to talk about Homeopathy as a quasi-religious cult-like practice and community. We also had a movie night with Chris Johnson where we showed and discussed “a better life”.

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors or speakers from Allianz vun Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker?

Reuter: Since all of our members of the executive board act as volunteers and work in areas not directly related to humanism, atheism or criticism of religion, and since our association is still relatively young, we have not yet really had authors or speakers emerging from our community. But I am pretty sure that anyone from our former and current executive board would be able to speak about our past and current experiences in setting up and running a non-profit association of humanists, atheists & agnostics in a country that has long been traditionally catholic but recently shifted towards a more secular society. I would however recommend as speakers the following people: (1) our former president, Laurent Schley because of his professional expertise in zoology; our former vice-president, (2) Taina Bofferding because she is currently serving as Minister for Home Affairs and as Minister of Equality between Women and Men and (3) our former secretary general, Manuel Huss because of his passion for astronomy and the beautiful pictures he has been shooting of a variety of outer-space objects.

Jacobsen: What are the main difficulties for the community there now?

Reuter: Our main challenge now that a large part of our political agenda has been achieved will be to move on to a more positive promotion of humanism as a life stance. We have indeed spent the past 10 years pushing the separation between the State and the Church (please read here: the various recognized religious communities but with a dominant Roman Catholic Church at the forefront), criticizing the Catholic Church as an organization and criticizing religious faith. We will keep being critical of religious beliefs and institutions and would have loved to push the (financial and cultural) separation between the State and the Church further, but we also will have to move on. We will try to grow a humanist community in Luxembourg where ideas can be shared, discussed and shaped about how to “live a good life” based on humanist values.

Jacobsen: How can other organizations learn from the real successes and honest failures of the Allianz vun Humanisten Atheisten & Agnostiker?

Reuter: That’s a good question. We were actually very lucky in the last years to catalyze a political change that nobody thought would be possible and would happen so quickly in our country. Not even we had dreamt it to be possible that the separation of the State and the Church would happen so quickly and swiftly. This change has been made possible by the convergence of many factors of course, but we can be rather confident to say that our first public campaign helped many secular-minded politicians to dare to take the steps necessary for this big reform. With our first campaign we had invited non-religious people in Luxembourg to dare to stand up for their rights, to be proud of their life stance and to dare to show their lack of faith. This campaign has been very well received by many “closet atheists” (and very badly by the “dominant” catholic community) and made it visible to the general public and politicians that there had been a major shift in religious beliefs in our country. With the weight of the illusion of a monolithically catholic population lifted, a coalition of mostly secular-minded politicians who came into power in 2013 dare to fight the financially over-privileged position of the Catholic Church. However, I would not dare to give other organizations any recommendations on how to use this stories to bring about similar changes in their own communities and contexts, because there were many factors involved in the development of this major political and cultural change.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on?

Reuter: The easiest way to become involved is to visit our website www.aha.lu and to contact us via email. We are also very active on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ahaletzebuerg/>). We have around 800 members who entirely finance our association via their membership fees and donations.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Reuter: Thank you very much for the opportunity to think about our association and for the exposure to your readership. It’s always interesting to shape, rethink and reshape the stories we tell ourselves about who and what we are.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Bob.



Scott Douglas Jacobsen is the Founder of **In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal** and **In-Sight Publishing**. He authored/co-authored some **e-books**, free or low-cost. If you want to contact Scott: **Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com**.
