



HUMANIST PROFILE

Sir Arthur C. Clarke (1917 - 2008)

Science fiction writer

"A faith that cannot survive collision with the truth is not worth many regrets."

—Arthur C. Clarke

Arthur Charles Clarke was born on December 16, 1917, in Minehead, England, where as a child he built telescopes and launched home-made rockets. Two formative events took place in Arthur's life at the age of thirteen: his father, a farmer, died, and he discovered the American science fiction magazine *Astounding Stories of Super-Science*.

Clarke moved to London in 1936 and pursued his early interest in space sciences by joining the British Interplanetary Society. He also started publishing stories during this time. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1939 and spent most of his service during World War II as a radar specialist.

In a 1945 paper published in *Wireless World*, Clarke seems to be the first person to articulate the idea of a communications satellite that could hover in outer space and relay signals across the globe. (He never patented the idea, however, and later wrote an essay subtitled, "How I Lost a Billion Dollars in My Spare Time.")

Clarke left the RAF in 1946 as a Flight Lieutenant and returned to London, where he obtained a first-class degree in mathematics and physics from King's College in 1948.

By 1951 Clarke had devoted himself to writing full-time. He went on to become a world-renowned science fiction author, with nearly thirty-five novels, thirteen short story collections, and countless essays to his name. Most famously, Clarke wrote the novel *2001: A Space Odyssey* (based on his 1948 short story "The Sentinel") and collaborated with Stanley Kubrick on the screenplay, which Kubrick produced and directed.

Clarke's work related to global satellite systems brought him numerous honors including the 1982 Marconi International Fellowship and the gold medal of the Franklin Institute. Today, the geostationary orbit at 36,000 kilome-

ters above the equator is named the Clarke Orbit by the International Astronomical Union. His fiction also garnered numerous awards and a 1999 Nobel Prize nomination in Literature. He was knighted in 1998 and was a member of both the Secular Humanist Society of New York and the International Academy of Humanism.

In all his enterprises, Clarke conveyed a belief that humankind's future and survival depend on exploration beyond Earth's boundaries. "Borrowing a phrase from William James, he suggested that exploring the solar system could serve as the "moral equivalent of war," read Clarke's obituary in the *New York Times*. "Giving an outlet to energies that might otherwise lead to nuclear holocaust."

After relocating to Sri Lanka in 1956 Clarke became a diving enthusiast, likening it to the feeling of weightlessness experienced in outer space. Clarke died in Colombo on March 19, 2008, after suffering from breathing problems associated with post-polio syndrome, which he had suffered from for over twenty years and which had confined him to a wheelchair.

Having stated earlier: "Absolutely no religious rites of any kind, relating to any religious faith, should be associated with my funeral," Clarke was buried in Sri Lanka on March 22, with his brother and his Sri Lankan adoptive family among the thousands in attendance.

Dubbing it a "cosmic coincidence," the Arthur C. Clarke Foundation reported that on the day Clarke died, "the NASA satellite Swift observed four separate Gamma Ray Bursts ... each the signature of a massive star reaching the end of its life and exploding." The entry concludes with this quote from his short story "The Nine Billion Names of God":

"...overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out."

HUMANISM is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Free of theism and other supernatural beliefs, humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.





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