



UNDERSTANDING HUMANISM
Resources for Education

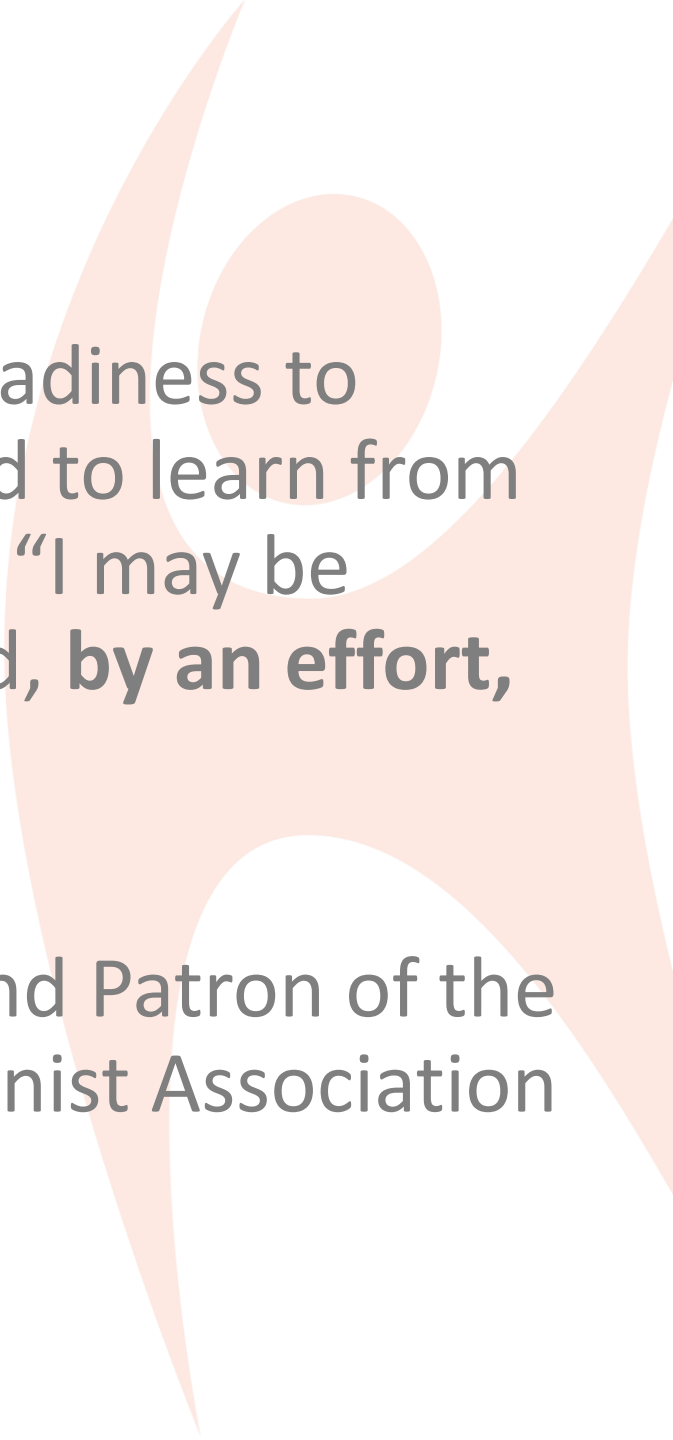
What is Humanism?

Age 11-14

What do humanists believe?

Humanists have set of rules they must sign up to. Many will disagree on the specifics of the best way to live. But most will agree with the following key beliefs:

- Believe the world is a natural phenomenon with no supernatural side, and **science** provides the best way to understand it
- Are **atheists** (don't believe there is a god) or **agnostics** (believe we can't know if there is a god)
- See no evidence for an afterlife, nor an 'ultimate', external meaning to life, but believe we are instead **capable of making our own lives meaningful** and supporting others to do the same
- Believe in being a good person and we should use **reason, empathy, compassion, and respect** when deciding how to act
- They believe in freedom of religion and belief, and that no one religion or belief should hold a privileged place
- Value humanity and **celebrate** human achievements



‘**Rationalism** is an attitude of readiness to listen to contrary arguments and to learn from experience. . . of admitting that “I may be wrong and you may be right and, **by an effort, we may get nearer the truth**”’

Karl Popper, philosopher and Patron of the
British Humanist Association

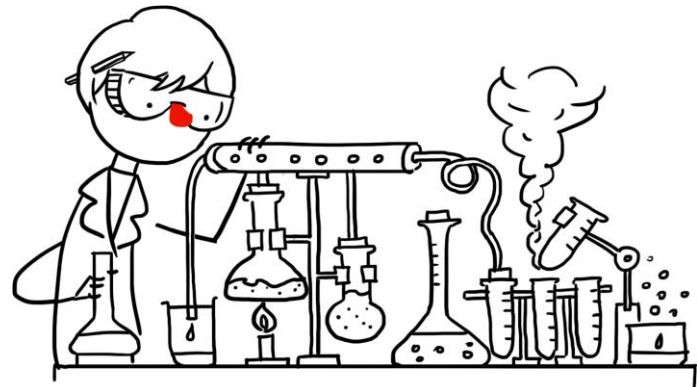
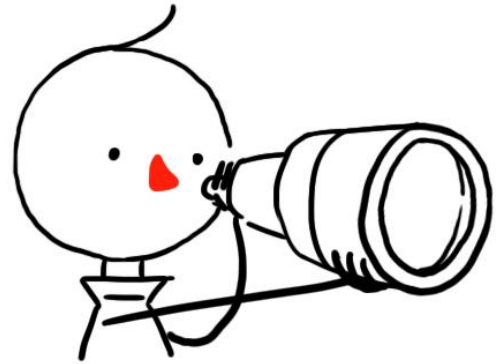
Understanding the world

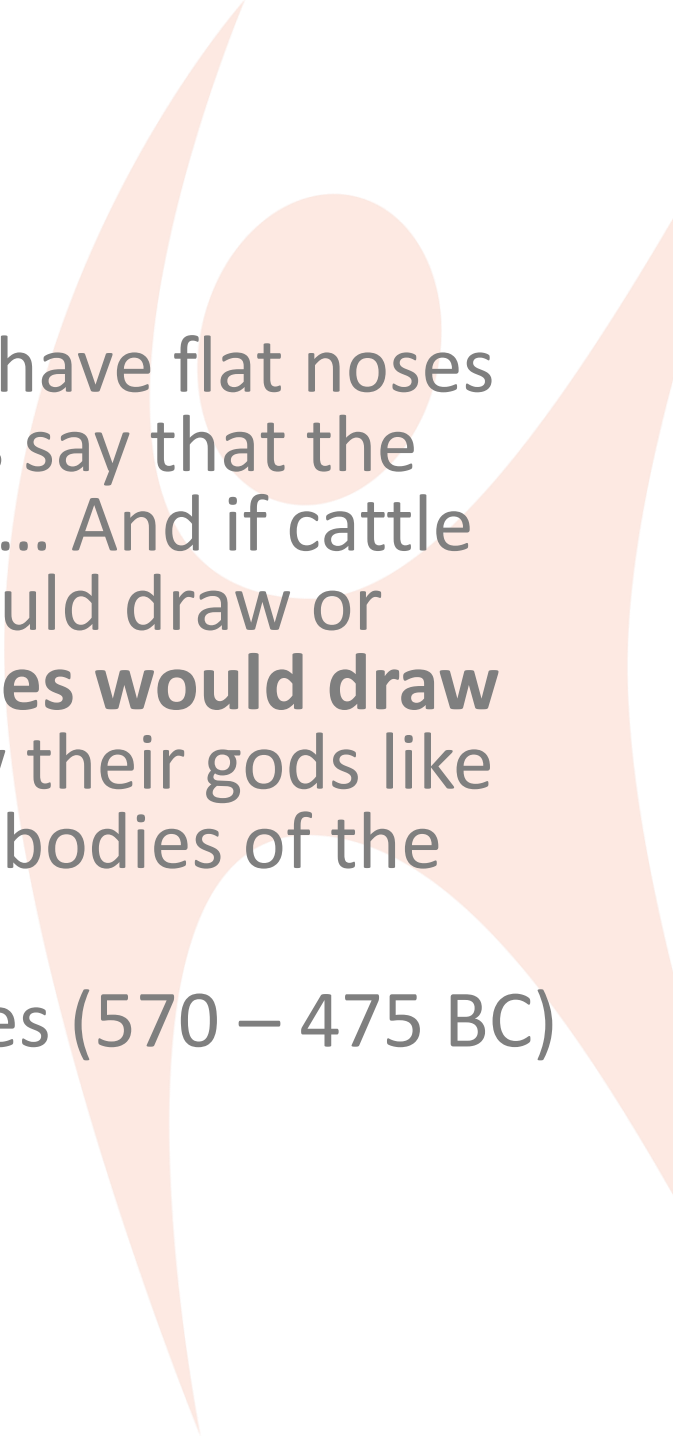
The world is a **natural** phenomenon.
Everything has a natural cause.
No evidence for any supernatural side.

How can we know what is true?

- Reason
- Evidence
- Science

Claims should be **testable**.





‘The Ethiopians say that the gods have flat noses and are black, while the Thracians say that the gods have blue eyes and red hair... And if cattle or horses or lions had hands or could draw or sculpt like men can, then the **horses would draw their gods like horses**, cattle draw their gods like cattle, and both would depict the bodies of the gods in their own likeness.’

Xenophanes (570 – 475 BC)

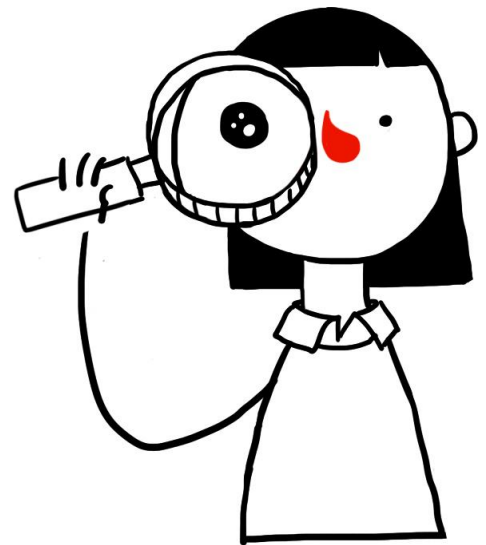
Atheism and agnosticism

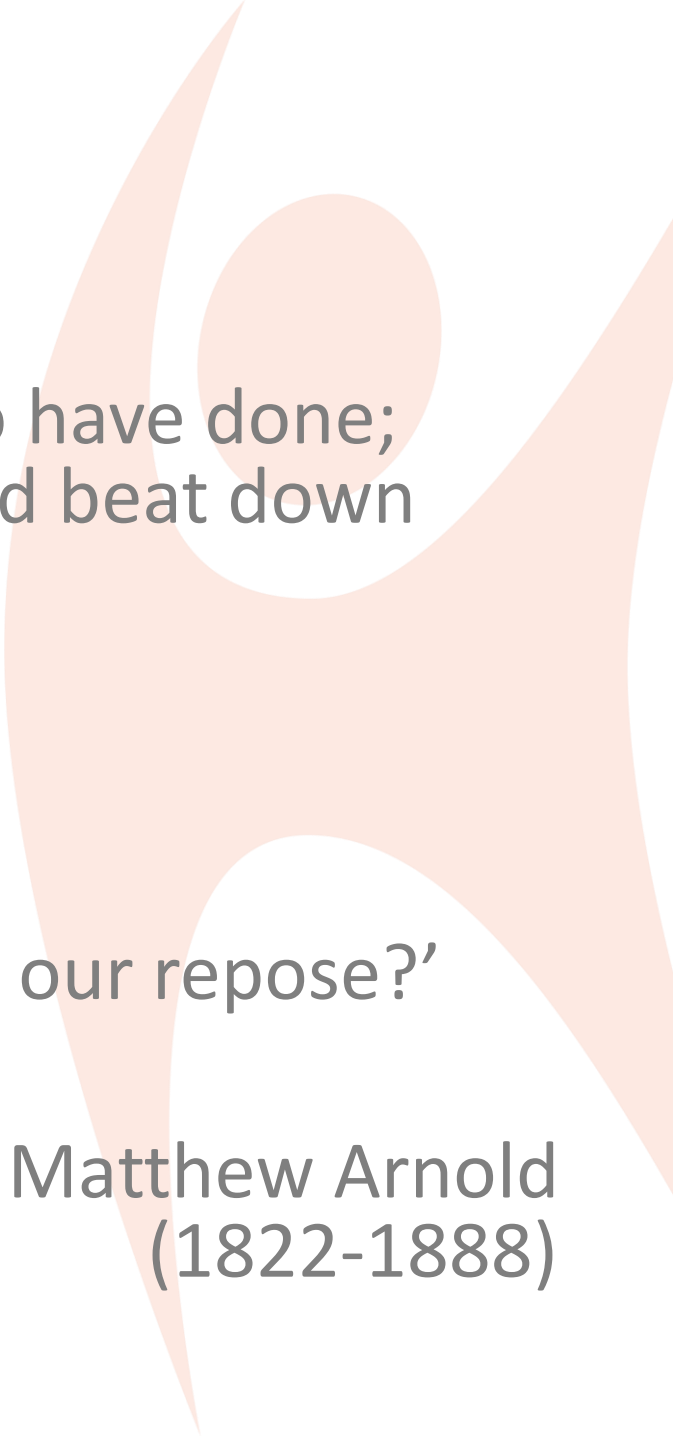
Humanists don't see any good **evidence** that a god or gods exist.

Atheists: don't believe in a god or gods.

Agnostics: believe we can't know if a god or gods exist.

- Humanism is **more** than just not believing in a god.
- For humanists, the most important thing is not whether you believe in a god or not, but **how you live your life**.
- Humanists believe we can be **good** and **happy** without the need for a god or a religion.



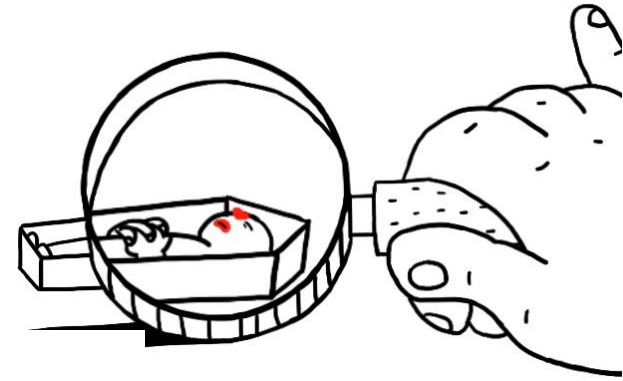


‘Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;
To have advanced true friends, and beat down
baffling foes;
That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And while we dream on this
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?’

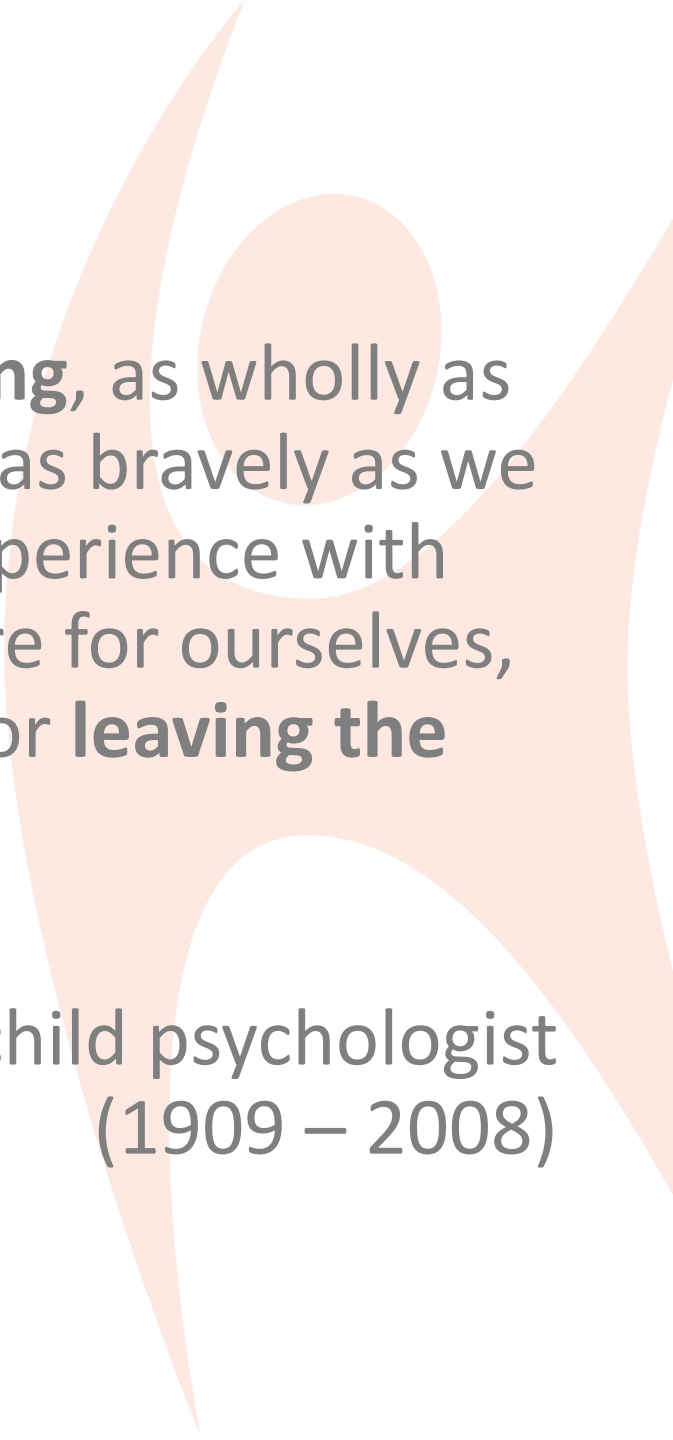
From the Hymn of Empedocles, Matthew Arnold
(1822-1888)

One life

Death is the end of our personal existence.
There is no good evidence for an afterlife.



After we die, our **atoms, genes, and works** can survive, and our **shared ideas and experiences** can live on in the memories of others.



‘In life, **the meaning comes in living**, as wholly as we can, as abundantly as we can, as bravely as we can, here and now, sharing the experience with others, caring for others as we care for ourselves, and accepting our responsibility for **leaving the world better than we found it.**’

James Hemming, humanist and child psychologist
(1909 – 2008)

Making our lives meaningful

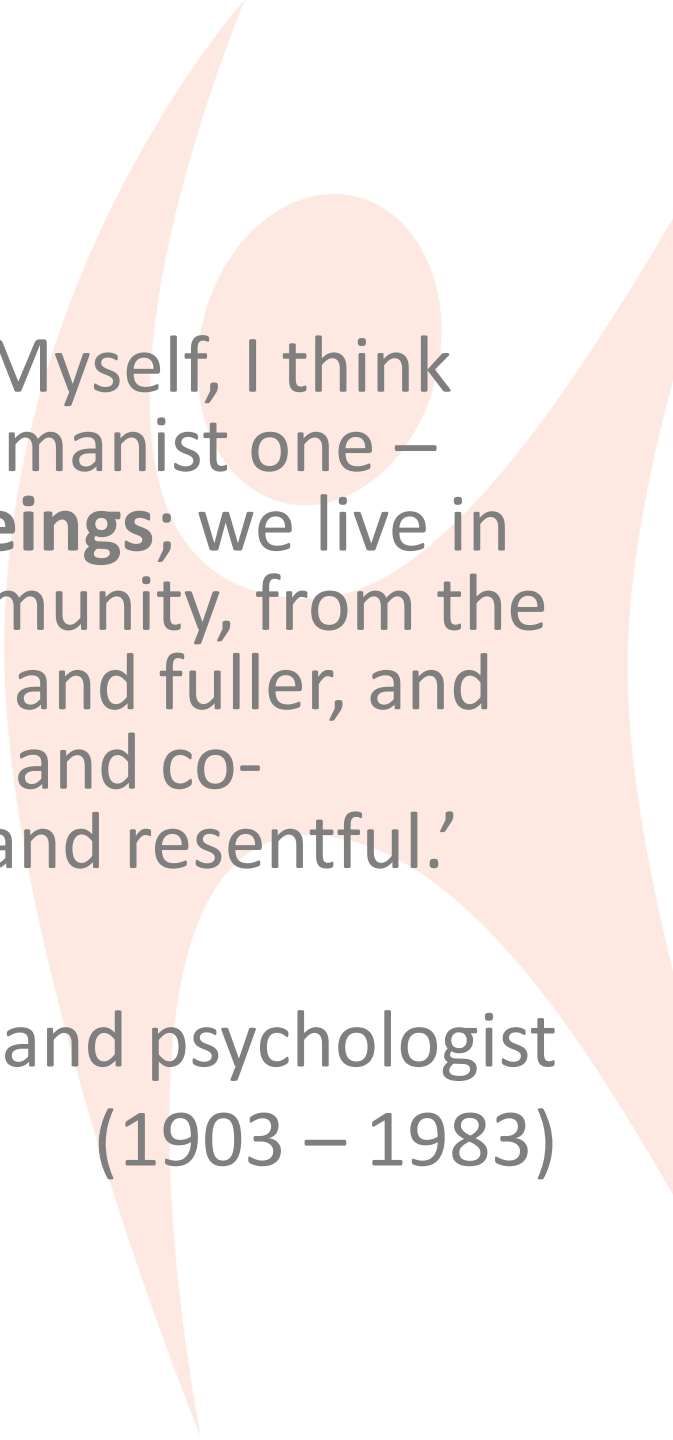
No 'ultimate' external meaning of life.
We can make our own lives meaningful.
Not one single answer.



We should have **respect** for the many diverse ways of living as long as they do not cause harm to others (or the environment) or restrict others from living a good life themselves.

‘[The good life] would have two general characteristics: that it feels good to live, and that it is more beneficial than not on its impact on others.’

A. C. Grayling, philosopher

A stylized, abstract orange figure is positioned on the right side of the slide. It has a circular head and two long, flowing, arm-like shapes extending downwards and outwards, resembling a person in a dynamic pose.

‘Why should I consider others?... Myself, I think the only possible answer is the humanist one – because we are naturally **social beings**; we live in **communities**; and life in any community, from the family outwards, is much happier, and fuller, and richer if the members are friendly and co-operative than if they are hostile and resentful.’

Margaret Knight, humanist and psychologist
(1903 – 1983)

Morality as a human achievement

Consider the **particular situation**, think about the **consequences** and use...

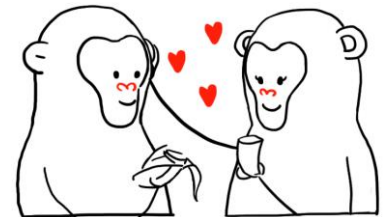
- **Reason**: Thinking carefully and critically
- **Empathy**: Thinking about how others will feel
- **Compassion**: Concern for the suffering of others
- **Respect for the dignity of all persons**: Treating everyone as of value



The Golden Rule

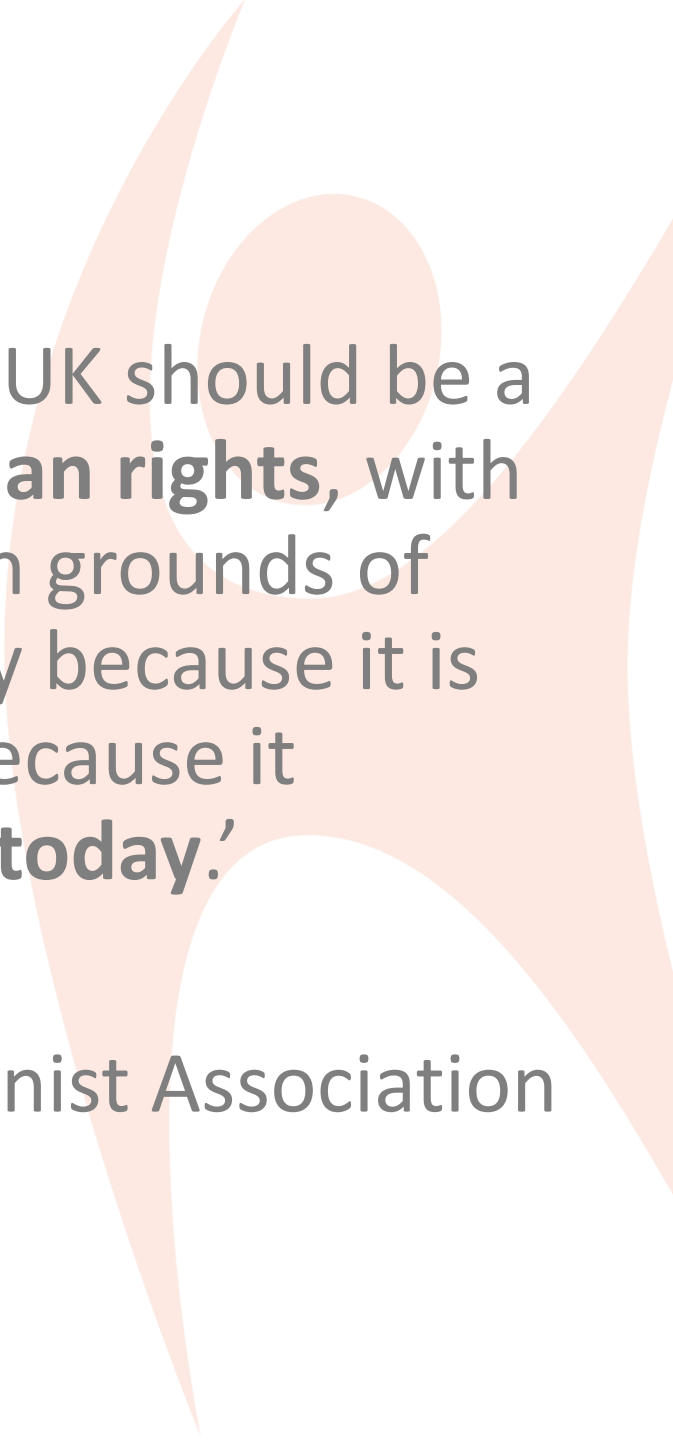
Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.

Do not treat others in a way you would not like to be treated yourself.



Our morality **evolved naturally** from the way our species has lived together in communities. It is a project or a journey with the aim of **improving human welfare in this life**.



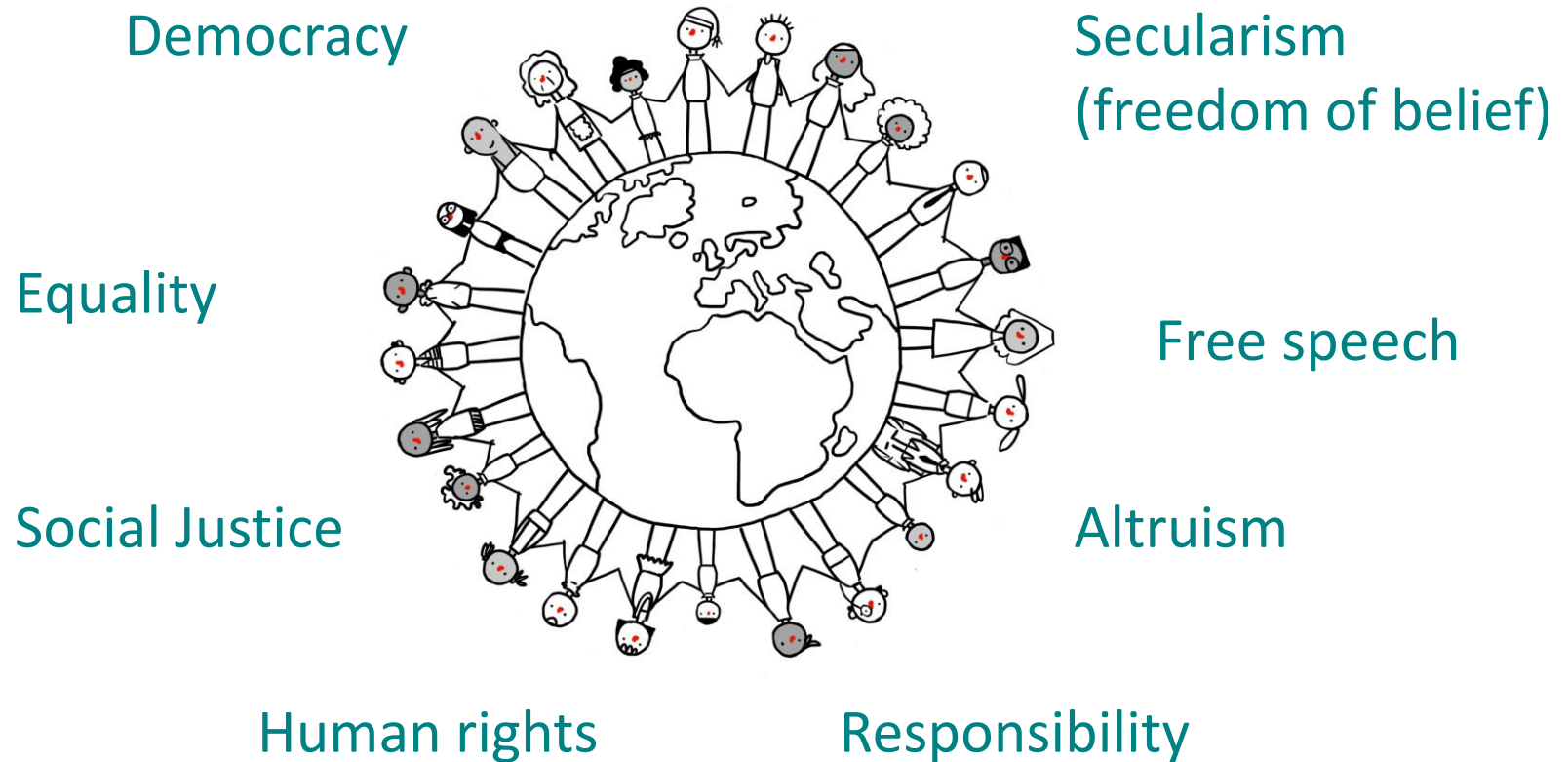


‘One of our key aims is that the UK should be a **secular state** guaranteeing **human rights**, with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. This is not only because it is the fairest approach, but also because it **reflects the diversity of Britain today.**’

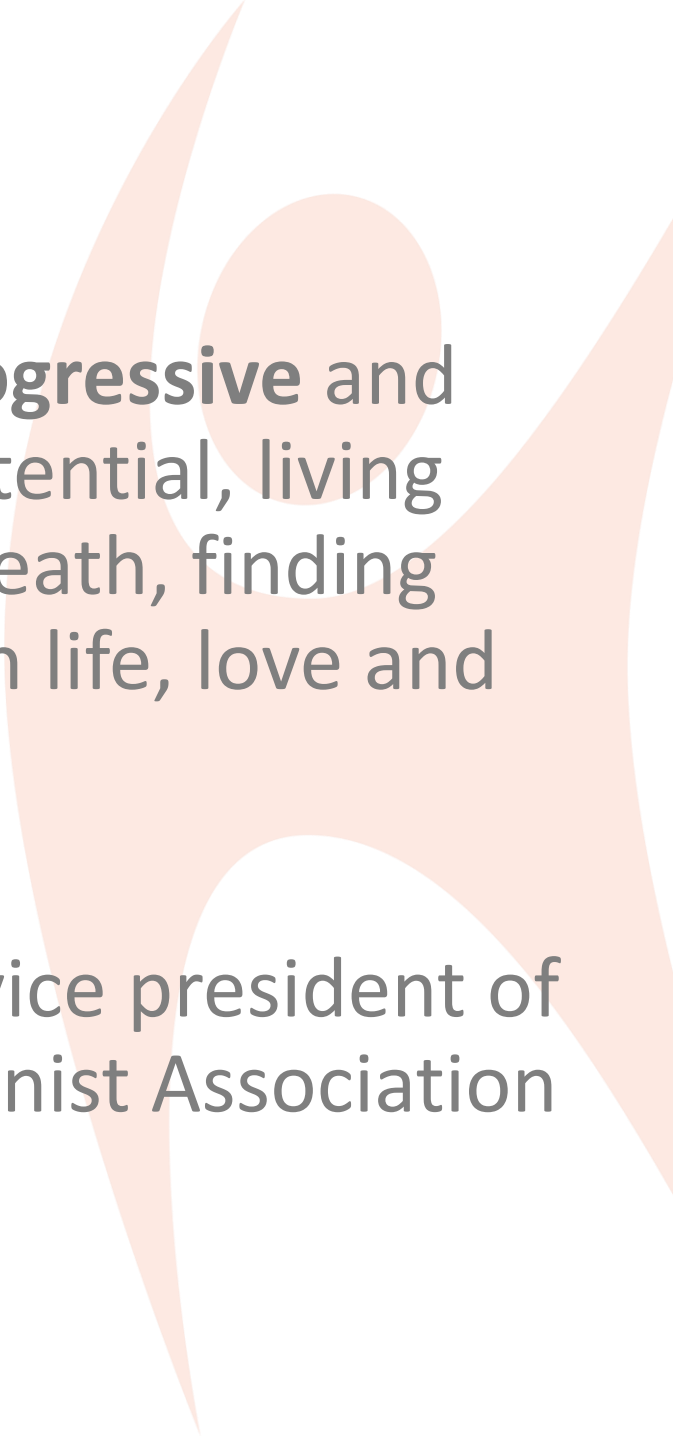
The British Humanist Association

Humanism in society

What would a humanist world look like?



Does Humanism make the world a better or worse place?

A large, stylized orange graphic of a human figure with arms raised, positioned on the right side of the slide. The figure is composed of simple, rounded shapes in a light orange color.

‘The humanist view of life is **progressive** and **optimistic**, in awe of human potential, living without fear of judgment and death, finding enough purpose and meaning in life, love and leaving a good legacy.’

Polly Toynbee, journalist and vice president of
the British Humanist Association

Valuing human achievements and capabilities

Humanists are **optimistic about human potential**.

Humanists **celebrate** the many things human beings have accomplished.



What can we celebrate about being human?

What great things have human beings accomplished?

Question 1

Humanists believe...

- a) Science provides the best method for understanding the universe.
- b) Religion is needed for a complete understanding of the universe.



Question 1

Humanists believe...

- 1) **Science provides the best method for understanding the universe.**
- 2) Religion is needed for a complete understanding of the universe.



Question 2

A humanist...

- a) Is certain there is no god.
- b) Believes in a god.
- c) Sees no good or persuasive evidence to believe in a god.



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Question 3

Humanists believe...

- a) After we die we will be resurrected.
- b) We can live on through our genes, our works, and in the memories of others.
- c) This life is just one of the many lives that we will live.



Question 3

Humanists believe...

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Question 4

Humanists believe...

- a) Life has no meaning.
- b) God and an afterlife are necessary for life to have any meaning.
- c) We can make our own lives meaningful and there are many different ways we can do this.



Question 4

Humanists believe...

- a) Life has no meaning.
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Question 5

Humanists believe we can work out how to behave by...

- a) Following rules found in books and given by figures of authority.
- b) Using reason and empathy to think about the consequences and how other people will feel.
- c) Just acting on our instincts.



Question 5

Humanists believe we can work out how to behave by...

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- c) Just acting on our instincts.



Question 6

Humanists believe...

- a) What is right and wrong depends on the effects on human welfare in this life.
- b) What is right and wrong is unchanging, whatever the circumstances.
- c) What is right and wrong is just a matter of personal preference.



Question 6

Humanists believe...

- a) **What is right and wrong depends on the effects on human welfare in this life.**
- b) What is right and wrong is unchanging, whatever the circumstances.
- c) What is right and wrong is just a matter of personal preference.



Question 7

Humanists believe...

- a) Our morality evolved naturally from living together in communities.
- b) Without god there can be no morality.



Question 7

Humanists believe...

- a) **Our morality evolved naturally from living together in communities.**
- b) Without god there can be no morality.



Question 8

Humanists believe...

- a) We should allow freedom of religion or belief.
- b) Religion should have a special place in society.
- c) Religion should be banned.



Question 8

Humanists believe...

- a) **We should allow freedom of religion or belief.**
- b) Religion should have a special place in society.
- c) Religion should be banned.



Question 9

Humanists believe...

- a) Without a god and religion, life is miserable and pointless.
- b) We can lead a good, happy, and meaningful life without the need for a god or religion.



Question 9

Humanists believe...

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- b) We can lead a good, happy, and meaningful life without the need for a god or religion.**



Possible ingredients of 'the good life'

Food and drink

Relationships

Community

Money and possessions

Working to benefit humankind

Beauty and wonder

Music

Exploration and discovery

Being kind to others

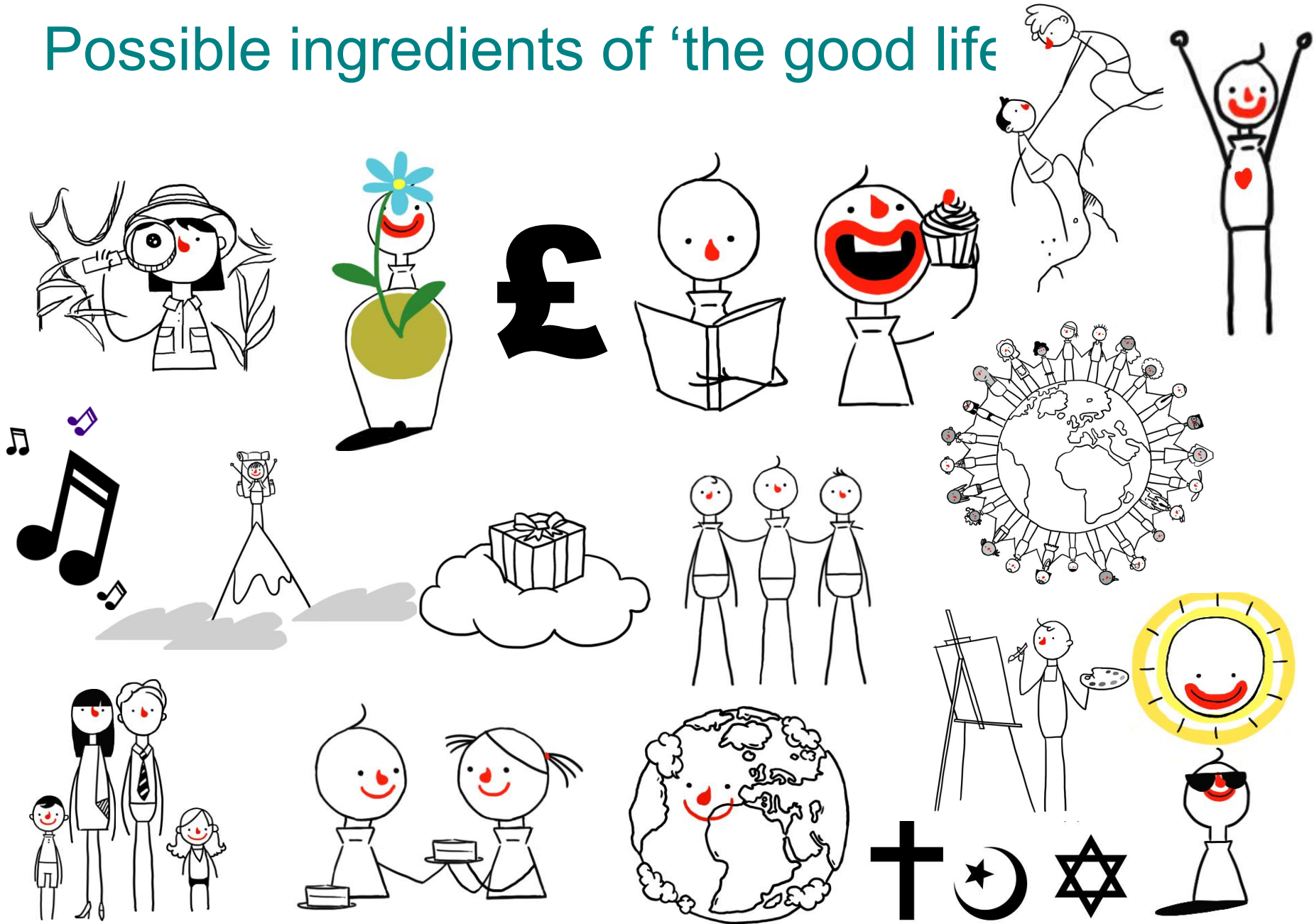
Learning new things

Completing something difficult

Good health

Developing your talents

Possible ingredients of 'the good life'



understandinghumanism.org.uk

Understanding Humanism
39 Moreland Street
London
EC1V 8BB

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