

Abstract teal line art on a purple background, featuring a large, stylized figure with a circular head and flowing, ribbon-like limbs that curve and loop across the left side of the frame.

HUMANISM IN SIX WORDS

**THINK FOR YOURSELF,  
ACT FOR EVERYONE**

 Humanists UK



- The international symbol of Humanism
- Humans reaching their potential

# What we aim to cover today...



- 1. How do humanists make ethical decisions?**
- 2. Sanctity / value of human life**
- 3. Humanist views on abortion and euthanasia**
- 4. Is there a life after death?**
5. Humanist weddings and funerals
6. The beginning of the world
7. Caring for the environment
8. Humanist 'chaplains'
9. Is it appropriate for religion to have a role in the state?

# Definitions...



1. I will use the words **morality** and **ethics** interchangeably although their meanings are slightly different
2. Morality is about our behaviour
3. Ethics is theorising about right and wrong



What's the difference between  
**Humanism** and **atheism**?

**Humanism**

**Atheism**

**Religion**

**Theism**



- Who are they?
- Bill and Melinda Gates
- They have \$38 billion to spend on things like ending AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria
- Melinda is Catholic; Bill is atheist/humanist

# How do humanists make ethical decisions?



- Religious people generally believe that moral rules come from God
- For example, the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God
- So if humanists do not believe in God, how can they be moral or good people?







- **Key messages**
- Humanists think for themselves
- Humanist morality is based on empathy for other people and animals
- Respect the rights of others
- What's the kindest course of action?
- Do the least harm
- Consider the particular situation
- Weigh up the probable consequences
- Morality comes from **us**





- Religious morality is sometimes called ‘divine command theory’: God commands or forbids you to do something
- The problem with divine command theory was stated 2½ thousand years ago by the philosopher Plato:
  - Is something wrong because its wrong? Or is it wrong just because God says it’s wrong?



- Humanists think it's unwise to base our moral decisions on commands from a god
- Humanists base their moral decisions on a number of principles:
  1. **Commonsense** – we just know the difference between right and wrong
  2. **Autonomy** – we think for ourselves
  3. **Consequences** – do what causes happiness; avoid what causes harm
  4. **Human rights** – treat every human being with dignity and respect
  5. **Compassion and empathy** – we care about other people

# THE **HIGHWAY CODE**

ESSENTIAL FOR ALL DRIVERS

**FULLY UPDATED & COMPLETE**



PLUS TAKING YOUR TEST WHAT TO EXPECT



UPDATED RULES OF THE ROAD FOR ALL DRIVERS



KEY INFORMATION FOR ALL ROAD USERS INCLUDING  
CYCLISTS AND MOTORCYCLISTS

- Morality is a bit like the Highway Code
- The Highway Code is a human invention
- What would happen if we didn't have the Highway Code?
- Humanist morality is not written down in a list of commands

# Where does morality come from?



- **Evolution:** Humans are a social species and morality is an evolved ability which helps us live together in groups
- **Education:** we learn the difference between right and wrong at home and school
- **Consensus:** there is general agreement in society about the main moral rules

# Some sources to help us think about morality



- **Aristotle:** if we live a good life we will flourish and be happy
- **John Stuart Mill:** the aim of morality is to increase happiness and decrease suffering
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:** rights to life, liberty, security and so on
- **The Golden Rule:** treat others as you would like to be treated

# Activity



1. If you were alone on a desert island what moral rules would you need?
2. Assuming there is a group of you on the desert island, make up 10 moral rules for living together

# What do humanists think about the ‘sanctity’ or value of human life?



- **Sanctity**
  - Holy or sacred; of ultimate importance
- **The humanist view**
  - For humanists, protecting life is important because humanists believe that *this is our one life*
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 Article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”



# Humanist views on abortion



- Let's look at early human development...

# Human Embryonic and Foetal Development



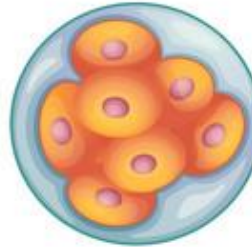
Fertilized egg



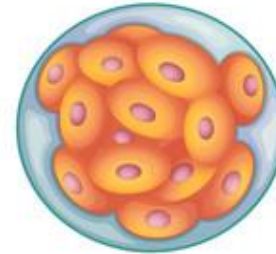
2-cell stage



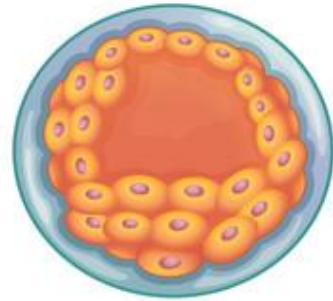
4-cell stage



8-cell stage



16-cell stage



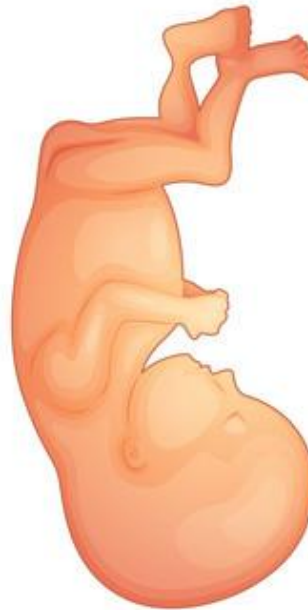
Blastocyst



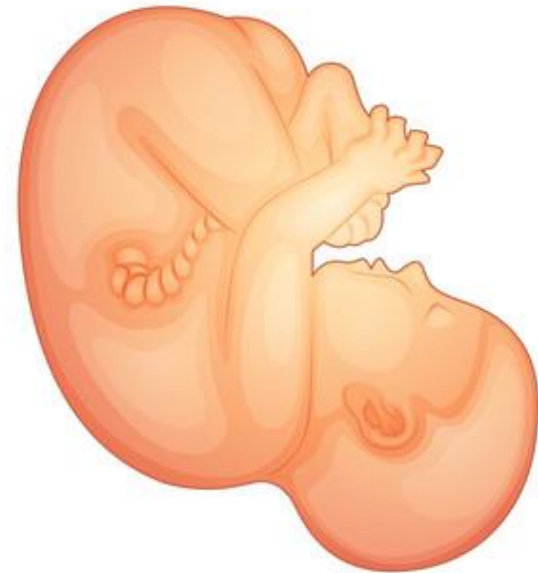
Foetus - 4 weeks



Foetus - 10 weeks



Foetus - 16 weeks



Foetus - 20 weeks

- Abortion is permitted in England up to 24 weeks (babies are usually born at 40 weeks)
- 200,000 abortions in the UK every year
- Some people think that abortion is simply murder and that's that
- Humanists don't think abortion is murder but why not? What ethical principles do they use?





- **Human rights** – do they apply to embryos?  
When does an embryo become a human?
- **Human rights** – should society force a woman to have a baby just because she falls pregnant?

- **Consequences** – if society forces women to have babies they may have dangerous ‘backstreet abortions’
- **Consequences** – if society forces women to have a baby they do not want or cannot care for, what effect will that have on the child?
- **Consequences** – we may know people who exist today because they were not aborted
- **Consequences** – a woman may come to regret her decision later



- Humanists consider the **moral complexity** of abortion
- Humanists are generally in favour of allowing women to make the decision, within the law



# Humanist views on euthanasia



- Also known as ‘assisted suicide’ or ‘assisted dying’ for terminally-ill people who are or likely to be suffering unbearably
- Legal in California, Washington, and Oregon
- Some people think that this is always wrong because it’s up to God when we die
- Humanists don’t think this – but why?



- **Diane Pretty** had Motor Neurone Disease (MND). She wanted to control the time and manner of her death. Because of her condition, she needed help from her husband to die.
- Diane took her case to the European Court of Human Rights. She argued that the right to life included a right to choose whether to carry on living. The court disagreed.
- In May 2002 she died in the way she feared – breathing difficulties which led to a coma and then death



# Activity



- Do you think the law should be changed to allow terminally-ill people to have **assisted dying**?
- Think of some reasons based on **human rights** and **consequences** and **compassion**



- **Human rights** – the right not to suffer unbearably when this could be prevented
- **Human rights** – we treat dogs more compassionately
- **Consequences** – many people argue that old people will feel pressurised to end their lives so as not to be a burden
- **Consequences** – some people will kill themselves earlier or go abroad to get help to die

- **Possible solutions**
- Make it legal but with very careful safeguards such as a waiting period and assessment by doctors
- Improve end of life care in hospices
- Recognise that 'assisted dying' takes place anyway in hospitals when doctors prescribe strong painkillers

**CAMPAIGN FOR  
DIGNITY  
IN DYING.**

# Is there life after death?

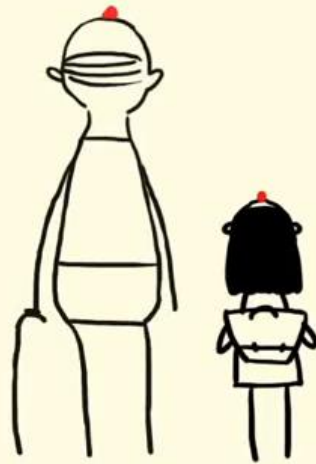


- Humanists believe that we are very complex biological machines
- Humanists don't believe that we have a 'soul' or 'spirit' inside us that leaves the body at the point of death
- When we die it is like pulling the plug on a computer and wiping the hard disk

- Humanists think that 'death is nothing'
- Humanists think that life is our 'slice of eternity' and that we should live the best life we can
- Life is worth living for its own sake, not as a preparation for life after death



# WHAT SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT DEATH?





- **Key messages**
- We will all die
- No evidence that minds can survive the death of our bodies
- How could we experience anything if we were disembodied?
- If life were eternal, wouldn't it lose its structure and purpose?
- Death is a natural part of life
- We should come to terms with it and make the most of our one life
- We will 'live on' in some ways through the influence we had on others





- **Consequences**
- Humanists try not to waste any time
- We only have 1,000 months to live
- We try to make the most of life
- When loved ones die they remain close to us in our emotions and memories
- A humanist funeral is a celebration of someone's life and acceptance that their life has ended: music, poetry, the story of their life



# Humanist ceremonies

- Humanist celebrants conduct very sensitive and personal humanist ceremonies
- Naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals
- The ceremony is designed individually to suit the people involved



# The beginning of the world



- Humanists generally trust science to provide us with answers about world
- The universe began 13.8 billion years ago
- The Sun formed 5 billion years ago
- The Earth formed 4 billion years ago
- Life on Earth started around 3.5 billion years ago
- Humans appeared about 200,000 years ago

# Consequences



- Humanists do not believe that God created the world
- A possible scientific explanation for the universe is an infinite multiverse like a bubble bath
- The Sun will get too hot for life on Earth in about 1 billion years' time
- There may be life on other planets but the times and distances are so huge it is difficult to find, even if it's there

# Caring for the environment



- World population will soon reach 10 billion people
- Humanists want everyone to have a decent life
- Many humanists believe this is possible if we improve technology and live more sustainably
- Humanists for a Better World is an online group

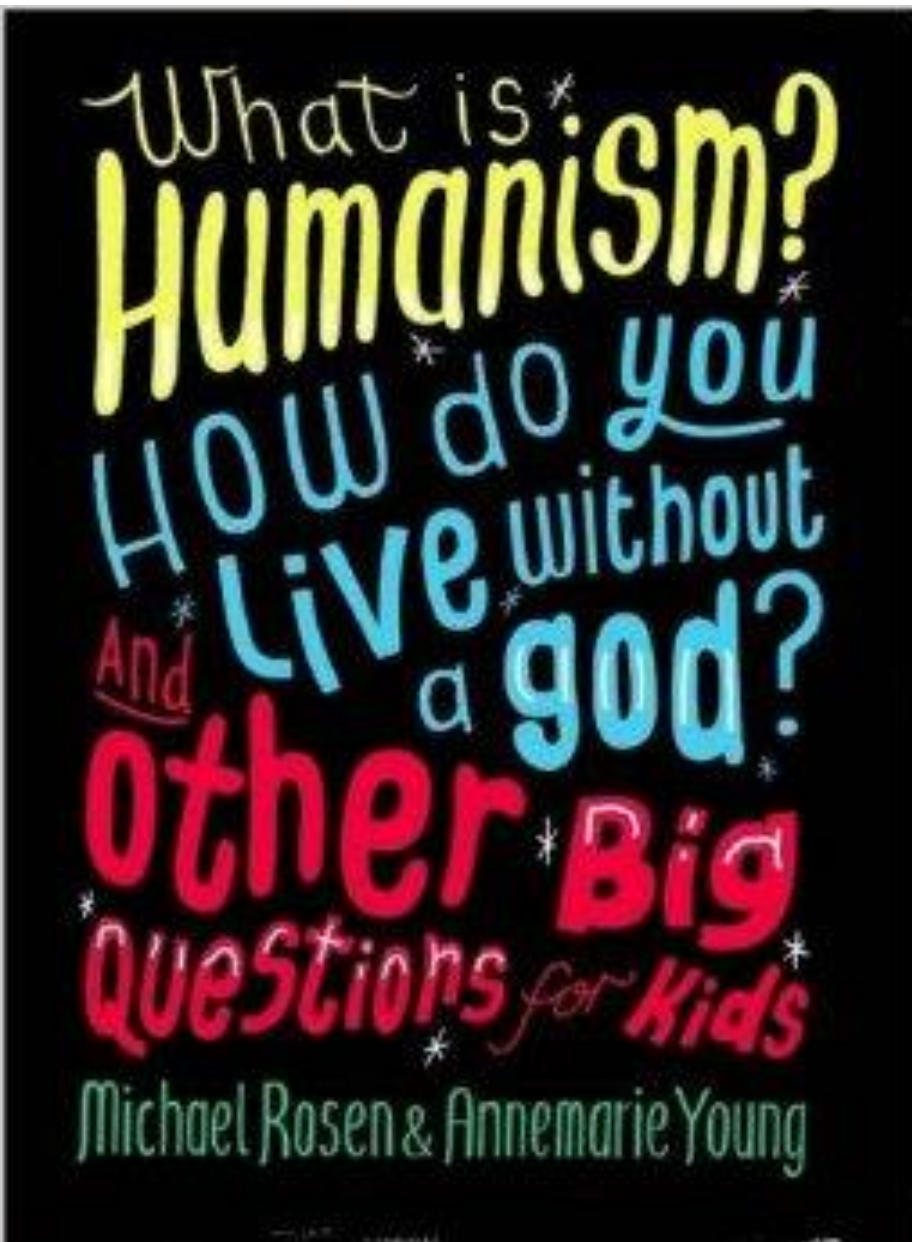


- Most pastoral support is provided by religious chaplains
- 50% of people have no religion
- Humanists UK is training a network of pastoral support workers to go into places like hospitals and prisons to offer non-religious pastoral support to people

# Is it appropriate for religion to have a role in the state?



- Humanists believe that religion and state should be kept separate
- Humanists believe that when the state is Christian rather than secular this tends to give unfair status and privilege to religion
- So humanists campaign for a secular state, not to ban religion but in order to be fair to everyone



Abstract teal line art on a purple background, featuring a large, stylized figure with a circular head and flowing, ribbon-like limbs that curve upwards and outwards.

HUMANISM IN SIX WORDS

**THINK FOR YOURSELF,  
ACT FOR EVERYONE**

 Humanists UK