

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AND RESPONSIBILITY

Human beings are limited in many ways: how fast we run, how much we know, and how long we live. We can be selfish, cruel, and unfriendly to those who are different from us. We have been responsible for many terrible things: war, inequality, and the destruction of the environment. Many humanists believe it is important to recognise this. We are far from perfect.

However, many humanists recognise we have also evolved **positive capacities**. There is a lot we can **celebrate** about being human. We are conscious, curious, and creative creatures. Humanists believe that all our capacities evolved **naturally**.

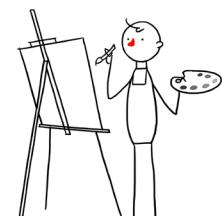
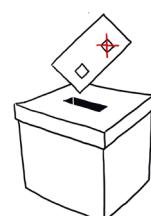
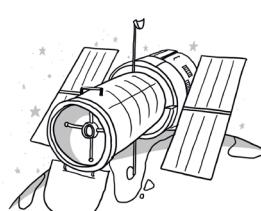
- 1. We can ask and answer questions about the world.**
- 2. We can be creative and we can imagine how things could be different.**
- 3. We are capable of empathy, kindness, friendship, and love.**
- 4. We can communicate with each other, and can share our ideas, knowledge, and experiences.**
- 5. We can plan for the future.**
- 6. We can be happy.**



Working together, we have been able to overcome many of our limits. We have developed technology and medicine, created art and music, and established democracy, education, and human rights. The world may be far from perfect but, for billions of people, life is better now than in the past. Many humanists believe we can celebrate human progress as long as we recognise that there is still more work to be done.

Many humanists argue that we have a **responsibility** to think about how we use our capacities. They ask how we can overcome our negative instincts and make the most of our positive **potential** in the one life we have. By doing this, and encouraging other people to do the same, we can make the world a better place. For humanists, if we want a better future, it is up to us to make it happen.

## human achievements



# HUMANISTS ON HUMAN POTENTIAL AND RESPONSIBILITY

‘We, as humans, have the power to make good choices, to lead a good life, to create a better society – and look after our planet, too. Humanists think that hope for a better future lies with the choices we make, and that our own human capacities for reason, love, and empathy and moral sense can make us better people.’

**ALICE ROBERTS,**

President of  
Humanists UK



‘I believe in living, the enjoyment of being, the fulfillment of our powers, the wonders of nature, the marvels of the cosmos. We don’t have to bother ourselves too much about what lies behind it all. It’s there. We are here. What is is. Our job is to get on with things, trying to make life better as we go.’

**CLAIRE RAYNER,**

writer, broadcaster, and  
former President of  
Humanists UK



‘For me the most important questions are not ‘How did we get here?’ or ‘Does god exist?’. I’m much more interested in how we, humanity, can increase the amount of good and minimise the harm we do, to each other and to the planet. And how I can live an interesting, enjoyable, and meaningful life.’

**ANNEMARIE  
YOUNG,**  
author of *What is  
humanism?*



‘Humanism stresses the fact that we, human beings, are capable of changing the world. That we have the power to make a difference in our lives, both individually and collectively... Our destinies are in our hands. We have the capacity to reduce suffering, extend life, prevent diseases, and preserve our planet.’

**LEO IGWE,**  
founder of Nigerian  
Humanists



## QUESTIONS



- What do humanists think we can celebrate about being human?
- Where do humanists believe our capacities come from?
- How do humanists believe we should use our potential?