

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

BELIEFS

We all have many different beliefs, and there are many different reasons we might believe something:

- 'I believe that my friend's car is blue because I **saw** it.'
- 'I believe that King Henry VIII died in 1547 because I **read** it on the internet.'
- 'I believe that my mum has the key in her pocket because she **told** me she has.'
- 'I believe that it will rain today because I **dreamed** it would happen.'
- 'I believe that the missing cat is alive because I just **feel** she must be.'
- 'I believe that aliens have visited Earth because **all my friends believe** they have.'
- 'I believe that plants need water to grow because I did an **experiment** to test it.'

Our beliefs can be true or false. Sometimes we make mistakes. We might misremember or our brains might trick us into seeing or hearing things that are not really there. Sometimes people lie to us or accidentally pass on incorrect information. Feeling something must be true doesn't make it true.

Many humanists believe that we should be prepared to question our beliefs. We have a responsibility to ask questions, think clearly and carefully (this is called using **reason**), and look at the evidence. That way, we give our beliefs the best chance of being true.

ASK
QUESTIONS

THINK
CAREFULLY

LOOK
AT THE
EVIDENCE



QUESTION

- Can you think of an example of when your beliefs were mistaken? How did you realise? Why were you mistaken?



DAVID HUME,
philosopher (1711–1776)

'A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.'

SCIENCE

How science works – an example:

1. **Observation:** We see that the plants in our garden only appear to grow when it has rained.
2. **Hypothesis (an explanation for why things are the way they are):** Plants need water to grow.
3. **Prediction:** If plants don't get any water, they won't grow.
4. **Test (set up an experiment):** Put two plants into separate pots. Water one but not the other. All the other conditions are the same.
5. **Results (evidence):** The plant we watered grew. The one without water did not.
6. **Conclusion:** We now have some evidence that our hypothesis is correct (that our belief that plants need water to grow is true). However, to be more confident, we should repeat the test and try to think of other ways to test our hypothesis.



Science provides a way of looking for evidence and testing our beliefs about the world. If a claim has been well tested by science, then humanists will often think there is a good reason to believe it. If there isn't any scientific evidence, then they believe we should be cautious. We can't always carry out a scientific experiment ourselves, but it is important that an experiment can be done. For example, if someone told us that plants grow because they are built by tiny invisible green men, we should ask them how we could test that claim. If they can't give us a way to test it, then we would have a good reason to doubt what they say.

Scientists sometimes make mistakes, but science checks its results so that mistakes can be found and corrected. Science keeps asking questions and is never satisfied that it has all the answers. It has proved **incredibly** effective at helping us to make **progress** in our understanding of the world.

Answering questions can sometimes be hard work, but many humanists believe that **curiosity** about the world can be one of life's great pleasures and science can be a source of **wonder**.

'I am among those who think that science has great beauty.'

MARIE CURIE, scientist

'For me, as a scientist, trying to understand how and why the universe is the way it is and our place in it doesn't make it cold... It makes it even richer. Science allows me to acknowledge and appreciate the wonder of the world.'

JIM AL-KHALILI, scientist



QUESTIONS

- How can our beliefs sometimes be mistaken?
- How do humanists believe we should try to answer questions about the world?
- Think of two claims: one that can be tested by science and one that can't.
- What kinds of things might a humanist not believe in?

WHAT DO HUMANISTS BELIEVE?

Humanists believe the world is a **natural** place. There is no scientific evidence for the existence of supernatural beings (such as ghosts or spirits), supernatural powers (such as mind reading or seeing into the future), or supernatural forces (such as miracles). Humanists think we should try to explain how the world works without relying on anything supernatural. When we have questions about what happens around us and why, they believe we should look for natural explanations.



Humanists don't believe in a god. They don't think there is any good reason or evidence to believe. They recognise that there are many stories about gods in holy books such as the Bible, but they believe these are just stories, not true stories.

'Atheist' = *somebody who does not believe in a god*



Although humanists don't believe in a god, they recognise that many people do. Humanists support **freedom of belief**. We should be allowed to question each other and disagree. However, we should not tell people

what they must believe. We should not let our disagreements get in the way of friendship.

'A humanist is someone who will never tell you what to believe. We will never tell you what is absolutely true. We will never make claims that cannot be proven and that you cannot find out for yourself.'

STEPHEN FRY,

What is humanism?

