Understanding Humanism

Religious Studies GCSE: Including humanism and non-religious worldviews in examination answers

1) Introduction

All of the Religious Studies GCSE examination specifications contain the potential for students to encounter questions or topics of discussion that require them to demonstrate their understanding of a humanist or non-religious perspective. Sometimes a humanist or non-religious view is specifically requested. Other times, inclusion of a humanist or non-religious worldview is optional but can count towards a student's total marks.

We know from exam boards that students' answers about non-religious worldviews are often weak and cost them marks:

> 'Candidates should avoid mis-representing the non-religious beliefs of Atheists and Humanists; some seemed to think that not believing in God meant they had no principles or ethical views on anything'
>
> Eduqas 2019 Summer Examination Summary Report

This guidance is designed to enable teachers to support their students with including humanist perspectives in their GCSE answers. It includes an approach to answering questions that ask for, or offer inclusion of, a humanist (or non-religious) perspective, as well as information about where further helpful resources on the humanist approach to life can be found.

Humanists and the non-religious

Humanism is the predominant non-religious worldview in the UK[1] and can often be used in answers to questions that refer to 'non-religious beliefs'[2]. Humanists are atheist or agnostic and many people who describe themselves as 'atheist' or 'agnostic' will have a humanist approach to life (they will share the beliefs and values identified with humanism in the section below). However, it is important for students to understand that not all non-religious people (nor all atheists or agnostics) are humanist.

Note: the label 'humanist' has been used in different ways throughout history. However, the most likely way that it will be used in GCSE examination questions is to refer to the non-religious worldview described below (humanists who are atheist or agnostic).

[1] humanists.uk/2017/06/15/new-poll-shows-one-in-five-are-humanists-and-a-third-hold-humanist-beliefs
[2] Or 'non-religious approaches, perspectives, explanations, or worldviews'

2) Humanists

Roughly speaking, the word humanist has come to mean someone who:

- trusts to the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural (and is therefore an atheist or agnostic)
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals
- believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

More information can be found at understandinghumanism.org.uk.

When it comes to answering ethical questions, humanists do not believe that the answers come from religion, but are found through considering what actions best support the wellbeing and flourishing of human beings and other sentient life in the here and now. Of course, sometimes, humanists' and religious people's conclusions on what is the right thing to do will be the same. For humanists, answers can be reached by focusing on our shared needs and applying empathy and reason to moral problems. Believing this is the one life we have, and in the recognition that it is up to us to make our own lives meaningful, they strongly value personal freedoms and agency over our own lives. Their scientific approach to answering questions about the world leads them to try to make evidence-informed decisions.

Typically, therefore, humanists will try to take the following into consideration in their ethical decision-making:

1) Empathy and compassion for other people and other sentient life
2) The potential for happiness and wellbeing in the here and now
3) Respect for personal autonomy and human rights
4) Evidence that might inform their actions and the likely consequences

It is important to note that humanists are only human and, like all people, they often fail to live up to their ideals and aspirations. However, in answering exam questions, the recommended approach is to explain the way a humanist might *try* to act or the values they believe ought to inform their thinking and decision making.

Note: not all non-religious people are humanist. It is possible to identify as 'non-religious' but still believe in supernatural phenomena (e.g. ghosts or spiritual powers), or believe that we should always act in our own self-interest, or believe that life is entirely meaningless. If that were the case, then it would be inaccurate to describe such a person as 'humanist'.

3) Reference to humanists and the non-religious in exam questions

This guide was shared and discussed with all the exam boards before publication.

AQA

Paper 2A: Thematic Studies (8062/2A)
Paper 3B: Thematic Studies, textual route
Short Course (8061/5): Themes
Specification B (Perspectives on Faith) (8063/2A): Themes

Evaluation questions explicitly state the option to reference non-religious arguments, for example in the 12 mark A02 questions, or the 4-mark 'contrasting views' questions on Specification B, paper 2A. A question may state that answers "may refer to non-religious arguments" in the bullet points.

Edexcel (Pearson) A

Area of study 3: Philosophy and Ethics
Area of study 4: Textual studies

This exam board explicitly names in the bullet points listed under the question and in the specification when non-religious views are accepted. For example:

"The cosmological argument proves that God exists."
Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.
In your response you should:
• refer to Christian teachings
• refer to non-religious points of view
• reach a justified conclusion.

Edexcel (Pearson) B

Area of study 1: Religion and Ethics - section 2 (Marriage and the family) and 4 (Matters of life and death)
Area of study 2: Religion, peace and conflict - topic 2 (Crime and punishment) and 4 (peace and conflict)
Area of study 3: Religion, philosophy and social justice - topic 2 (Philosophy of Religion) and 4 (equality)

This exam board explicitly names in the bullet points listed under the question and in the specification when non-religious views are accepted. For example:

"Sex outside of marriage is always wrong."
Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.
In your response you should:
• refer to Catholic teachings
• refer to non-religious points of view
• reach a justified conclusion.

OCR

Component 2: Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective

Non-religious views are required in theme 4 (dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes). The British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK) is listed as an example source of authority.

OCR recommends only including humanist views for questions that explicitly ask for them or require non-religious views in order to ensure relevance.

Eduqas A

Component 1: Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the modern world

Non-religious views are required on the type D (debate) questions on theme 2 (issues of life and death). These questions require pupils to give two arguments around a statement, one of which must be a non-religious argument. The other must be a religious argument.

Some type B (describe) questions on theme 2 also demand non-religious views. In these cases, humanist or non-religious views are directly named in the question.

Non-religious views may be accepted beyond theme 2 where the question is around an issue as opposed to a religious teaching. Most of these are type D (debate) questions, though some are type B (describe) questions that require pupils to give a detailed description of the named topic.

Eduqas works on a principle of positive marking. So long as the content is accurate and answers the question, it will be credited.

Eduqas B

Component 1: Foundational Catholic Theology - themes 1 and 2
Component 2: Applied Catholic Theology - themes 3 and 4

Non-religious views are required on the type D (debate) questions on theme 1 (origins and meaning). These questions require pupils to give two arguments around a statement, one of which must be a non-religious argument. The other must be a religious argument.

Non-religious views may be accepted beyond theme 1 where the question is around an issue as opposed to a religious teaching. Non-religious views are mentioned in the specification content for these themes.

Eduqas works on a principle of positive marking. So long as the content is accurate and answers the question, it will be credited.

WJEC

Unit 1: Religion and philosophical themes

Non-religious views are required on the type D (debate) questions part B, theme 1 (issues of life and death). These questions require pupils to give two arguments around a statement, one of which must be a non-religious argument. The other must be a religious argument.

Non-religious views may be accepted beyond theme 2 where the question is around an issue as opposed to a religious teaching.

Unit 2: Religion and ethical themes
OR Unit 3: Catholic Christianity and themes

Non-religious views may be accepted beyond theme 2 where the question is around an issue as opposed to a religious teaching.

WJEC works on a principle of positive marking. So long as the content is accurate and answers the question, it will be credited.

New specification taught from September 2025

Unit 1: Religious and non-religious beliefs, teachings and practices

Non-religious perspectives will be assessed in relation to Christian perspectives and Catholic Christian perspectives.

Students need to discuss a statement, using reasoned arguments and reach a justified conclusion. They must refer to Christian and non-religious beliefs, teachings and perspectives in their answers.

WJEC works on a principle of positive marking. If the content in an examination response is accurate and answers the question, it will be credited.

Unit 3: Roles, rights and responsibilities

Non-religious perspectives will be assessed in relation to Christian perspectives and Catholic Christian perspectives.

Students need to discuss a statement, using reasoned arguments and reach a justified conclusion. They must refer to Christian and non-religious beliefs, teachings and perspectives in their answers.

WJEC works on a principle of positive marking. If the content in an examination response is accurate and answers the question, it will be credited.

Example questions from exam papers

Below are a selection of the types of statements featured in discussion questions on Religious Studies exam papers in which a humanist perspective might be appropriately included (these come from across the range of exam boards):

- 'The most important purpose of a family is to educate children in a faith.'
- 'Divorce is never right.'
- 'Euthanasia is never the best option.'
- 'Being prepared to fight a war is the best way to keep the peace.'
- 'Reformation is the best aim of punishment.'
- 'Giving money to charity is the best way of helping the poor.'
- 'Sex outside marriage is always wrong.'
- 'It is a woman's right to choose abortion.'
- 'Only religious believers have a responsibility to care for the environment.'
- 'Everyone should obey the laws of a country.'
- 'Everyone should be allowed to express their religious beliefs.'
- 'Capital punishment is wrong.'
- 'Religion has no place in a secular society.'
- 'There is nothing wrong with euthanasia.'
- 'It is never right to have an abortion.'
- 'Weapons of mass destruction should never be used.'
- 'All children should have a religious upbringing.'
- 'All people must support human rights.'
- 'Cohabitation is always wrong.'
- 'It is important for all people to work for social justice.'

4) Answering exam questions

God, the afterlife, and human origins

Questions may come up about philosophical debates on the existence of a god or an afterlife, or on the origins of human beings or the universe. Here, one can state that humanists see no persuasive reason or evidence to believe in a god or afterlife, and believe the scientific account for our origins provides the best-evidenced explanation for the evolution of ourselves and the universe. (They acknowledge that we still don't have a full scientific explanation for the origin of the cosmos, but believe the approach most likely to be fruitful is to continue to look for one.) Students can therefore cite humanist views in support of atheist or agnostic positions on the existence of a god, or in support of a scientific understanding if including scientific theories in their answers. Further information on humanist responses and their reasoning can be found in the resources linked below.

Humanism, religion, and secularism

OCR's theme 4 (dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes) sometimes features more general questions on humanist beliefs and values and their similarities to and differences from religious beliefs. Again, below you will find links to resources on the core features of a humanist approach to life.

Questions sometimes come up about secularism. Humanists will typically be secularists (as will many religious people) in that they support freedom of religion or belief in society and believe no religious or non-religious worldview should hold a privileged position in the running of the state. Further information can be found in the resources linked below.

Ethical questions

Some questions seek a humanist perspective on a contemporary ethical debate on topics such as medical ethics, relationships, or the environment. Here we would recommend taking the following approach when asked to include a humanist perspective or offered the opportunity to include one (obviously, the level of detail needed depends on the number of available marks):

1) Apply your understanding of **humanist beliefs and values** to consider how a humanist might respond to the topic under debate. For example, how might a humanist…
    a) Apply empathy and compassion for humans and other animals
    b) Act in a way that supports happiness and wellbeing in the here and now
    c) Act in a way that respects personal autonomy and human rights
    d) Look at the evidence and try to act rationally (considering the consequences)

    Students might make reference to the Amsterdam Declaration (2022)[3], a statement on the principles of modern humanism. (Note: it should be explained to students that the Amsterdam Declaration is not a prescriptive set of requirements on humanists, rather it is a descriptive account of the shared beliefs and values of members of humanist organisations across the globe. It is not therefore a 'source of wisdom or authority' in the same sense as a holy text. However, exam boards may treat it that way.)

2) Reference an existing **area of campaigning** by a humanist organisation such as Humanists UK or Humanists International and/or a **case study** of an individual humanist (either contemporary or historic).

Students should therefore be supported to become confident in answering the following questions:

1) Can I explain how a humanist might apply the following to the topic under debate: empathy, support for human flourishing, respect for personal autonomy, and a rational assessment of the evidence?
2) Can I provide an example of humanist campaigning and/or a case study to support my answer?

Of course, not all humanists will agree on the answers to the questions under discussion. In particular they may prioritise the aims and values in number 1 differently. One's answer can therefore only provide a way that a humanist *might* consider the question at hand, rather than describing a universal humanist approach.

[3] humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration

Indicative approach

Here is an example approach to the type of content that could be used to answer a question about the ethics of voluntary euthanasia (assisted dying). The volume of material expected in an answer will depend on the type of question, the marks available, and the available space on the answer sheet:

1) Humanist **beliefs and values** typically lead humanists to support a change in the law to allow people an assisted death:
    a) Humanists try to treat others with empathy and compassion. Empathy and compassion for somebody suffering would normally motivate us to find ways to relieve them of their suffering. If other methods (such as palliative care) are available and likely to be successful, then they should be explored first. However, if somebody's suffering is incurable, then, for humanists, an assisted death can be an acceptable choice.
    b) Humanists seek to act in ways that support happiness and wellbeing in the here and now. Being non-religious, humanists don't believe that life is sacred - what is important for them is quality of life. Life, for them, has value, but it is not merely *being alive* that has value, rather it is *having a life*. That includes experiencing joy, having positive personal experiences, and being able to make plans and look forward to the future. If a life has these features, then to take it would be wrong. But if these things are missing, or if they are outweighed by pain and suffering, then humanists are likely to believe there is no obligation on us to go on living.
    c) Humanists try to respect people's individual autonomy to make choices over their own lives. If a person has made a free, informed, and deeply considered choice that they wish to end their life peacefully without further suffering then we should respect their choice. This is to respect their agency and human rights. Currently, people in the UK have the option to fly to Switzerland, where assisted dying is legal, and use services such as Dignitas. However, such an option is expensive and therefore not an option for many people. Many humanists believe that creates an unfair inequality in the options available to different people.
    d) Humanists try to look at the evidence to inform their decisions and consider the consequences.
        i) Surveys show large public support for a change in the law on assisted dying with many people recognising that they would want the choice should they find themselves terminally ill or incurably suffering.
        ii) Humanists are supportive of good palliative care. However, the evidence shows that it does not work for everyone.

iii) Some people worry about a so-called 'slippery slope' and that voluntary euthanasia could lead to involuntary euthanasia (people feeling that they are a burden on society or being pressured into an assisted death). Here a humanist would say we ought to look at the evidence of what has happened in other countries that have legalised assisted dying. For many humanists, the evidence indicates that appropriate safeguards can be applied to avoid such a 'slippery slope'[4]. Of course, a perfect system can never be guaranteed, so the question is whether the potential risks outweigh the benefits to those seeking an assisted death.

2) Humanists UK **campaign** for a change in the law to allow those who are terminally ill and incurably suffering to request and be provided with medical assistance to end their own lives, subject to safeguards and protections[5]. Members of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (humanist MPs in parliament) have supported legislative change, including Rachel Hopkins MP (Labour), Lizzi Collinge MP (Labour), Sian Berry MP (Green), Tom Gordon MP (Lib Dem), and, in the Lords, Alf Dubs and Molly Meacher.

   Various **case studies** can illustrate examples of humanists campaigning for a change in the law:

   a) For example, following a car accident in 1990, humanist Paul Lamb was left with no function in his limbs apart from a little movement in his right hand. Working with Humanists UK, he campaigned for a change in UK law to allow the terminally ill and incurably suffering the choice of an assisted death, taking his case to the High Court on multiple occasions. He argued that his individual choice and personal autonomy ought to be respected. Paul died in 2021 without seeing any change in the law.
   b) Several humanists from history have been involved in campaigning for the right to an assisted death, such as Henry Stephens Salt or Barbara Wootton[6], who, in the 1970s, introduced the Incurable Patients Bill: 'to enlarge and declare the rights of patients to be delivered from incurable suffering.'

The resources identified in the **Resources** section below should support students to answer questions on other themes and debates in a similar fashion.

[4] Data from Belgium disputes the 'slippery slope' argument: theconversation.com/belgiums-euthanasia-trends-dispute-slippery-slope-argument-new-study-252323
[5] humanists.uk/campaigns/public-ethical-issues/assisted-dying
[6] heritage.humanists.uk/article/assisted-dying-2

5) Model part-answers

Below are a couple of examples of how students might include humanist perspectives within a question that seeks a non-religious view. This content would likely be included alongside content on religious perspectives on the topic to form part of the argument/evaluation. Students should be careful to include balance in their answers, and to ensure the demands of the question are fully met.

Example 1: 'Divorce is never right.'

Humanists will typically try to apply empathy and respect for happiness and personal autonomy when deciding on their views. They are generally supportive of liberal divorce laws. That might be informed by considering what action is likely to lead to the most happiness for a couple in an unhappy marriage. If separation is likely to lead to positive consequences in the longer term, then they believe it can sometimes be the right thing to do. Being non-religious, humanists do not believe that marriage is sacred. They accept that some relationships don't work out – people can make mistakes or circumstances can change. In those situations they respect people's personal freedoms and rights to make decisions over their own lives. Humanists also try to look at the evidence and might highlight the fact that changing marriage and divorce laws has, in particular, supported women's rights and autonomy over their own lives.

Some humanists and non-religious people have campaigned for the right to divorce. May Seaton-Tiedeman (1862-1948), was a lifelong activist with the Divorce Law Reform Union, arguing for 'better marriage laws for better marriages'. She campaigned for a rational, reasoned approach to marriage and divorce, rooted in compassion not tradition.

Example 2: 'Capital Punishment is wrong.'

Typically humanists will be opposed to the death penalty, a position that is rooted in their belief in the value of human life, the evidence for its ineffectiveness as a deterrent, and the potential for error. Humanists are supporters of human rights and the death penalty violates the most basic human right — the right to life. Supporters of human rights believe our rights can't be taken away. Humanists also try to use empathy and compassion when deciding how to treat people. They believe in the potential for individuals to change. The death penalty eliminates any possibility for people to reform. Humanists believe we should use evidence to inform our decision making. There is little evidence that capital punishment deters crime. The United States, for example, is one of the few democracies to retain capital punishment and has one of the highest murder rates among western democracies. The risk and evidence of wrongful convictions and the irreversible nature of the death penalty are also major concerns for humanists.

Humanists International campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty around the globe. In support of its stance, it cites the worth and dignity of every human being; the violation of our right to life; opposition to all cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; its ineffectiveness as a deterrent; and its irreversibility.

6) Resources

Information about the humanist approach to life can be found on understandinghumanism.org.uk.

Resources can be found under the five core areas of knowledge:

1) Human beings
2) Understanding the world
3) The one life
4) Humanist ethics
5) Society

The humanist perspectives page contains resources on many of the contemporary ethical debates explored in the RS GCSE: understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives.

Further supporting information can be found on the following websites:

- Humanists UK's areas of campaigning: humanists.uk/campaigns
- Humanist Heritage (for examples of humanists from history): heritage.humanists.uk

Schools can book a visit from a free, trained humanist school speaker who can answer students' questions: understandinghumanism.org.uk/school-speakers.

Teachers can sign up for CPD to support their subject knowledge at understandinghumanism.org.uk/training.

The table below lists some of the resources available on Understanding Humanism that are connected with topics and themes that are likely to come up in examinations. Many of these feature on several of the different examination specifications.

Theme	Resources	Key information
General questions on humanism		
Humanism	understandinghumanism.org.uk/what-is-humanism/introduction understandinghumanism.org.uk/what-is-humanism/humanism-five-core-features understandinghumanism.org.uk/resources	See also the section on 'humanists' above
Philosophical questions		
The existence of god	For questions on this topic students should demonstrate their understanding of atheist responses to such questions. However, examples of humanists, who do not believe in a god, can be found in our resources. understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/atheism-and-agnosticism • Atheists, agnostics, and humanists • Why atheists don't believe in a god (and their explanations for why some people do) • Miracles: a humanist perspective • The problem of suffering (and the Evil God challenge) • Theodicies: atheist responses	• Atheists are people who do not believe in a god; agnostics are people who claim we cannot know whether a god exists or not • Humanists will be atheist or agnostic or both • They see no persuasive reason or evidence to believe in a god or gods • They might cite the existence of widespread suffering as a reason to doubt the existence of a benevolent omnipotent god • They will look for natural explanations for 'miracles' or believe that such claims are mistaken • They believe people's beliefs in a god can be explained through biological and social explanations

Life after death	understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/human-beings • Mortality understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/the-one-life • Making the most of life • Should death be a source of fear and sadness? • What survives? (A humanist understanding) • Humanist funerals • Interviews with humanists (including funeral celebrants) The My Mortality collection offers short, personal, humanist perspectives on death and dying: humanists.uk/education/my-mortality	• Humanists believe this is the one life we have • They see no good reason or evidence to believe in an afterlife, and reject claims of evidence for an afterlife as unpersuasive • They believe that we should make the most of our lives in the here and now • They believe that, while death is the end of our lives, the impact we made on others and the world can outlive us
Origins	For questions on this topic students should demonstrate their understanding of the scientific approach to such questions. However, examples of humanists, who share such an approach, can be found in our resources. understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/human-beings • Human beings: where do we come from? • Lessons from Darwin	• Humanists believe the scientific story of our origins provides the best evidence-informed account of where we come from • They recognise the significant evidence for the Big Bang Theory and for evolution by natural selection • They believe great wonder can be found in the scientific explanation and what it reveals about us
Science	For questions on ways of answering questions about the world around us and explaining the phenomena we experience, humanists believe the scientific method provides the most reliable approach. understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/understanding-the-world • A humanist approach to understanding the world • Science and religion: humanism and religion	• Humanists seek natural explanations for phenomena • They believe science provides the most reliable method of answering our questions about the world • They believe relying on evidence gives our beliefs the best chance of being true • While science has not answered everything, they do not believe we need to turn to religion to

	• Natural explanations	answer those questions science has not, or cannot, answer - other disciplines are available
Ethics	understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/humanist-ethics • Being good • The evolution of morality • Are atheists immoral? • Interviews with humanists (including humanist philosophers) • *The life you can save* by Peter Singer	• Humanists believe that the origins of our moral capacities lie inside human beings and our evolution as social animals • They believe we should act in ways that support the wellbeing and flourishing of human beings and other sentient life • They believe that, when deciding how to act, we should consider shared human needs, apply reason and empathy, and consider the consequences of our actions
Secularism	For humanist views on organising society and their vision for a better world see understandinghumanism.org.uk/area/society • Humanist goals • A fair society (the veil of ignorance) • Secularism • Humanists in action	• Humanists value freedom, fairness, and kindness; they believe we should work for a society that respects democracy, human rights, secularism, equality, and the rule of law • Many recognise John Rawls' veil of ignorance as a helpful thought experiment when considering what kind of world we want • Humanists support secularism (including freedom of religion or belief), believing it can help to promote liberty, fairness, and peace
Contemporary ethical debates		
Abortion	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Looking at the evidence • A woman's right to choose Plus • Interview with lifelong campaigner Diane Munday	• Humanists typically support a woman's personal autonomy over her own body and her right to choose • They recognise the evidence that making abortion illegal does not stop abortion but instead increases the risks • They would typically not recognise an early stage

	• Interview with human rights lawyer Caoilfhionn Gallagher • Humanist Heritage article on the history of humanist campaigning on reproductive rights Humanists UK's abortion campaign page humanists.uk/campaigns/public-ethical-issues/sexual-and-reproductive-rights	foetus as a person with rights that outweigh those of the person who is pregnant
Animal welfare	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Vegetarianism and veganism Humanists UK's animal welfare page humanists.uk/campaigns/public-ethical-issues/animal-welfare	• Humanists recognise the evidence that animals are capable of joy and suffering • They will therefore believe they should be included in our circle of moral concern • They believe we should try to treat non-human animals compassionately • They will disagree over whether it is ethically justifiable to eat meat or animal products
Crime and punishment	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Do humanists obey the law? • What is punishment for? • Justice and human rights • Does prison work? • Capital punishment (the death penalty) • Humanist pastoral care (chaplaincy) Plus • Interview with humanist probation officer and pastoral carer Amy Waldon • Humanist Heritage article on the history of humanist pastoral care	• Humanists try to take an evidence-based approach to decision making over crime and punishment • They believe we should try to create the kind of society that minimises the likelihood of people turning to crime • While recognising there can be various reasons to punish someone for a crime, they typically believe that the main purpose of any punishment is reformation and rehabilitation • They typically reject capital punishment as ineffective and inhumane

	See also: Radio 4 animation: Lex talionis and retribution: Stephen Fry provides a humanist perspective on the potentially negative consequences of retribution	
Environmental issues	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Personal perspectives Plus • Interview with former Co-Leader of the Green Party, Siân Berry • Humanist Heritage article on the history of humanist environmentalism See also Humanist Climate Action: humanists.uk/humanist-climate-action	• Humanists recognise the overwhelming evidence for the harm human action is having on the environment • They recognise we are part of the natural world, connected to it and dependent on it, and that it is a source of wonder and joy • They try to apply empathy to future generations and to non-human life • Humanists believe that responsibility for the planet falls on human beings alone – help isn't going to come from elsewhere
Euthanasia	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Why does life have value? • Safeguards and slippery slopes • Humanist arguments Plus • Interview with campaigner Paul Lamb • Interview with Michael Irwin • Humanist Heritage article on a history of humanist advocacy • Data on public support for assisted dying Humanists UK's assisted dying campaign: humanists.uk/campaigns/public-ethical-issues/assisted	• Humanists typically support the right to choose and assisted death • They believe we should have personal autonomy of our own lives and choices • They believe nobody should have to suffer unnecessarily • They believe that the evidence points to the fact that assisted dying can be legalised with sufficient safeguards put in place to ensure it is not abused

	-dying	
Families and relationships	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • What is a family for? • Should we put our families first? • Marriage, civil partnership, and cohabitation • Gender equality in marriage • Bringing up children • Same-sex marriage and parenthood • Humanist marriages • Divorce • Sex and contraception Plus • Humanist Heritage article on the history of humanist campaigning on reproductive rights • Humanist Heritage article on the pill	• Humanists recognise the value of families as a source of love and support • They recognise that human beings are all part of one extended family • They support marriage but do not believe it should be an obligation for couples • They believe both parties should be equal partners in a marriage • They believe children should be brought up to decide for themselves what they believe • They support same-sex marriage and parenthood • They support liberal divorce laws • They believe sex can be a healthy ingredient of a happy life, and believe everyone should have access to contraception and relationships and sex education • They recognise the essential need for consent in an sexual relationship
Medical ethics	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Organ and blood donation • Assisted conception • Embryology and stem cell research • Biotechnology and genetic engineering • Circumcision Plus • Interview with Jamie Theakston on organ donation	• Humanists recognise that science can be used for both positive and negative ends • They believe decisions need to be based on the best available evidence and research • They believe we should consider the rights and dignity of the people involved and the consequences of any action we take, in particular asking whether the potential benefits outweigh the potential harms • They will typically support those practices that benefit human health and wellbeing (as long as they do not cause significant harm to other

		animal life or the planet) and oppose those that do not • They typically support organ donation, blood donation, assisted conception, and stem cell research • On questions around genetic engineering they will typically say decisions should depend on the potential benefits and risks
Prejudice and discrimination	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Shared humanity • What is a fair society? • Why do prejudice and discrimination exist? • Gender equality (education, suffrage, marriage and divorce, feminism) • LGBT equality • Racism • Discrimination against the non-religious Plus • Interview with John Amaechi on anti-racism • Humanist Heritage article on The Universal Races Congress Humanists UK's campaigns for human rights and equality: humanists.uk/campaigns/human-rights-and-equality	• Humanists oppose all forms of prejudice and discrimination, recognising our shared humanity • They typically believe everybody should have individual liberty and equal opportunities • They believe education and connection can help us to combat prejudice • There is a long history of humanist campaigning for women's rights and equality in education, marriage, and politics • They have long campaigned for LGBT rights, including same-sex marriage • They believe racism should be challenged, and contributed to historic campaigning for the abolition of slavery and civil rights • Humanists and non-religious people are discriminated against in many parts of the world where freedom of religion or belief is denied
Sex and contraception	See Families and relationships	
War and peace	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective:	• Humanists typically believe we should always try to seek non-violent solutions to our

	• A humanist approach • Causes of war • Weapons of mass destruction • Just war • Peace and pacifism • Carl Sagan's Pale Blue Dot Plus • Interviews with Defence Humanists • Interviews with A C Grayling • Oslo Declaration on Peace	disagreements • Some will be pacifists, but others believe that war can sometimes be justified to defend the lives and rights of people • They typically believe we need to look at the evidence and consider the likely consequences of any military action • They will disagree over whether the existence of nuclear weapons can be justified, however, they will object to their use and to the use of chemical weapons due to the threat they pose to civilians
Wealth and poverty	understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives Humanist perspective: • A humanist approach • Causes, consequences, and solutions • Humanists and charity • Humanists and the history of the welfare state • What is fair? • How far do our obligations stretch Plus • Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*	• Humanists recognise the evidence of the harms caused by poverty and inequality, and that people often find themselves in poverty though no fault of their own • They believe we have the potential to make a difference and the responsibility to act to alleviate suffering • They seek rational, evidence-based solutions that might involve giving to charity, but will also be focused on putting systems into place to avoid people falling into poverty in the first place • They support equality of opportunity • They believe empathy and reason can motivate us to take action to support those less fortunate than ourselves