



# THE ONE LIFE

*sessions*

Participants Pack

# SESSION 1

## ONE LIFE - INTRODUCTION TO A HUMANIST VIEW

### ONE LIFE

Accepting we have one life is a real focus. We cannot put anything off in the hope of some other life. This realisation can intensify our experience and make us more accountable and responsible for our actions. We need to focus more on what we want to achieve, including how we can contribute to making the world a better place for our children and for humankind generally.

### THE BIG QUESTIONS

To find a way of exploring the big questions and to seek a framework for understanding the world, people have created many different belief systems. Humanism offers tools to explore reality and life and understand it without resorting to the supernatural.

### WHAT IS HUMANISM?

Humanism is '...a beautiful and life-enhancing alternative outlook that offers insight, consolation, inspiration and meaning, which has nothing to do with religion, and everything to do with the best, most generous, most sympathetic understanding of human reality.' A.C. Grayling (B. 1949)

*'Throughout recorded history there have been non-religious people who have believed that this life is the only life we have, that the universe is a natural phenomenon with no supernatural side, and that we can live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity.'*

*'They have trusted to the scientific method, evidence, and reason to discover truths about the universe and have placed human welfare and happiness at the centre of their ethical decision making.'*

*'Today, people who share these beliefs and values are called humanists and this combination of attitudes is called humanism. Many millions of people in Britain share this way of living and of looking at the world, but many of them have not heard the word 'humanist' and don't realise that it describes what they believe.'* Humanists UK

### HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

A humanist perspective permits us to seek happiness where we can, and part of our happiness or contentment is found by helping others.

It is possible that well-being is a better word for happiness? Our sense of happiness and well-being is inextricably linked with the well being of our planet and fellow human beings. It is closely aligned with fulfilment and contentment and a sense of belonging.

At a basic level, seeking happiness is quite a simple process:

- Identify what makes you happy and do more of it.
- Identify what makes you unhappy and do less of it.

Often we are so busy with our lives that we don't even stop to do this basic audit of what is making us happy or unhappy.

### SOME FURTHER RESOURCES:

Humanists UK website: [humanism.org.uk](http://humanism.org.uk)

*On Humanism*, Richard Norman (2004)

*Meaning, Self and the Human Potential: An Appeal for Humanism*, Kristine Millar (2012)

*The Great Questions of Life*, Don Cupitt (2006)

*The Happiness Hypothesis*, Jonathan Haidt (2006)

*Secularism, politics, religion & freedom*, Andrew Copson (2017)

### THOUGHTS ON OUR NEXT SESSION

#### SESSION 2 - FREE-THINKING AND THE NEED FOR SCIENCE

Central to a humanist perspective is the concept of free-thinking, not taking things for granted, and trust in science and the scientific method to help us learn about the world we inhabit and enrich our understanding and experience.

Does dogma get in the way of understanding?

Do we know what free-thinking is?

Are we fallible? How do we think with an open mind? Is there such a thing as truth?

How can science help us find what is true?

Does scientific method give us reassurance?

Can science help us find a sense of belonging and help with meaning and purpose?

## SESSION 2

# FINDING OUT - FREE THINKING AND THE NEED FOR SCIENCE

### REALITY

Understanding reality enables us to better deal with things, improves our perceptions of where we are in the world and where we are going. Humanists want to consider many angles and make good decisions that are fair and beneficial to all.

### DOGMA

The propensity for establishing worldviews or paradigms to explain and create an understanding of the world is common in religions. These worldviews often became dogmas, immutable 'truths' that are not to be examined or questioned and are closely associated with power and control by people in authority.

### FREETHINKING

Humanists reject dogmatism whatever its source and instead try to adopt a free thinking approach which is sceptical of information and curious to find the truth of a situation. Humanists try to approach things rationally and with an open mind. We examine the information we receive critically, and look for evidence to support the arguments we make.

### HOW OUR BRAINS WORK AND MAKE US FALLIBLE

Our brains learn how to see things and make sense of them - using reference points to determine what images we see.

'We fool ourselves that something is right for all sorts of reasons - because it is comfortable to do so, because we've been conditioned to do so, because others think so, because it is fashionable to do so.'  
*Jeaneane Fowler, Humanism: Beliefs and Practices*

Our brains use powerful short cuts every day and we have a number of inbuilt biases. We can all sometimes prefer to err on the side of accepting things that confirm what we already think we know and which can make us feel better. It takes practice to question your biases.

### CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is an approach that asks us to stop and step back from a problem or situation - to put aside our pre-conceptions, think creatively, make sure we understand the issue or problem, find the evidence we need to consider and analyse it in a clear, rational, open-minded way.

### SCIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Humanism places a great deal of importance on science and scientific method as the best way for us to learn about our world and our best chance of knowing what is true.

Scientific method is a body of techniques for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, or correcting and integrating previous knowledge. To be termed scientific, a method of inquiry is commonly based on empirical or measurable evidence subject to specific principles of reasoning. Ideas are tested empirically and then tested again in an ongoing process.

Science enables us to tackle diseases and conditions that have dogged mankind. It allows us to gain a greater insight into the macro and micro elements of ourselves and the world of which we are part.

### LIVING WITH DOUBT

An inherent element in the scientific method is doubt and a built in avoidance of scientific knowledge becoming a new dogma. Living with doubt is an essential facet of living and thinking as a humanist and it is in many ways liberating.

"Science does not aim at establishing immutable truths and eternal dogmas; its aim is to approach the truth by successive approximations, without claiming that at any stage final and complete accuracy has been achieved." *Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)*

### A SENSE OF BELONGING

Using knowledge of ourselves and our place in the world allows us to consider abstract ideas such as meaning and purpose. We are part of nature and are still contemplating what that entails. We are part of something with no apparent purpose and yet something which can fill us with wonder.

### FURTHER READING:

*The Magic of Reality* (2012), *Unweaving the rainbow* (2006), Richard Dawkins

*The Ascent of Man*, Jacob Bronowski (Book & DVD - 1973 dated but inspiring!)

*The Enigma of Reason*, Mercier/Sperber (2017)

*Ideas That Matter*, A C Grayling (2010)

*The Age of Wonder*, Richard Holmes (2008)

*The Demon haunted world - Science as a candle in the dark*, Carl Sagan (1995)

*The incredible unlikeliness of being: Evolution and the making of us*, Dr Alice Roberts (2014)

*A brief history of time*, Stephen Hawking (1987)

*A short history of truth*, Julian Baggini (2017)

### THOUGHTS ON OUR NEXT SESSION

### SESSION 3 - DECISION ETHICS AND MORALITY

Having science and scientific method combined with a critical thinking approach empowers us with the assurance that what we know about the world has some basis, and that we can guard against some of our fallibility when making decisions. What guidelines can we use to consider what might be the right thing to do. Why should we be good?

## SESSION 3

# DECISION ETHICS AND MORALITY

How do we know how to interact with each other? How may we use the information we have and how we might decide what constitutes a good life? How can we live well together?

### EMOTIONS

In our day to day lives our physiological and mental well being influences how we see and react to the world around us. Our emotions and moods can add to existing foibles and make some reactions irrational. In some circumstances we have to make judgements quite quickly, it's important that we recognise that we could get the wrong end of the stick.

### HUMAN RESPONSES

A high proportion of human responses to physical stimuli and to emotional situations are automatic. When our bodies are stressed we rush to judgements, anxious to deal with a situation quickly so that we can return to a state of security. That suggests a strong evolutionary element to human reaction and influence on decision making. Being aware of how we feel helps our judgement in making important decisions.

### CONSIDER THE FACTS

Humanists try to approach things rationally and with an open mind. We examine the information we receive critically, and look for evidence to support the arguments we make.

### A NEED FOR TOLERANCE

We are social animals with two million years experience of living together. We have learned and continue to learn how we can best interact with each other to our mutual benefit. We have learned that our lives are unique and that we are all different and have to tolerate these differences to enable us to live the lives we wish to live.

### ETHICS AND MORAL CODES

Some studies have suggested that our ethical capacity may have developed through our biological evolution and our moral codes through cultural evolution. This presents a powerful and persuasive theory of the origin of our morality. It is probably empathy and a form of consequentialism which ultimately drives our morality and our ethics - if we co-operate or our group performs better then we have a better life and so on.

Humanists try to embrace the moral principle known as the 'Golden Rule', otherwise known as the ethic of reciprocity, which means we believe that people should aim to treat each other as they would like to be treated themselves - with tolerance, consideration and compassion.

### SENSORY ANIMALS

Humans are sensory creatures and we should delight in sensory experience. We have evolved with bodies that allow us to experience great pleasures. Our creations in music, art, architecture, and technology are in themselves awe-inspiring, and our desire to ensure that everyone enjoys life and has access to enjoy knowledge is truly empathetic. Some people seek to restrict sensory pleasures and even some music and art on the grounds of morality.

### SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

Humanists can draw on a lot of philosophical positions to arrive at an ethical stance. Principles of liberty and freedom are important and join with the wish to promote the greatest happiness for all. The humanist tradition draws on human history to try and consider our current condition in the light of an accumulation of human knowledge and experience, unfettered by any external source. A positive approach to life leads to a deep respect for humanity and human rights. It offers a positive context to humanist ethical positions that allows us to accept our fallibility, appreciate reality and look for the best solutions.

### FURTHER READING

*The Evolution of morality*, Richard Joyce (2006)

*An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics*, Mary Warnock (2006)

*Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics*, Richard Holloway, formerly Bishop of Edinburgh (2004)

*Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age*, A C Grayling (2003)

*Critical Reasoning in Ethics: A Practical Introduction*, Anne Thomson (1999)

*Being Good*, Richard Norman (2017) (e-book available to download at [humanism.org.uk/humanism/the-big-questions/](http://humanism.org.uk/humanism/the-big-questions/))

### THOUGHTS ON OUR NEXT SESSION

### SESSION 4 - RELIGION

Although 52% of the UK population are non-religious, religion is still an integral part of many modern societies in the developed world. In many cases religious views are increasing in correlation with populist political views and an ever increasingly global population.

- How can we better understand religion?
- Can humanists adopt aspects of religion?
- How do we interact with religious people?

# SESSION 4

## MAKING SENSE OF RELIGION

### THE STATUS OF RELIGION

Most people in the world today are religious. They derive their meaning in life from a supernatural power. Humanists see no evidence for this, and derive meaning from their interactions with the people around them, in the one life they know they have.

### RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

Can we appreciate the reasons why some people are religious and how they manage the tensions between faith and reason?

To try and understand a religious view, it's useful to understand the language of religion, some of the key terms used can help us gain an insight into a different way of looking at life and the world. It can also help us be clearer on the differences between a religious and non-religious viewpoint.

### RELIGION IN THE UK

Recent surveys have suggested that those that identify as having no religion are in the majority of 52%. This grouping is often referring to several different worldviews, only some of which may be humanist or similar. For many who are open about being non-religious, religion can still remain a source of inspiration and even guidance.

### CAN WE ADOPT ASPECTS OF RELIGION IN A NON-RELIGIOUS

Should we reject everything to do with religion or cherry pick useful elements?

The argument of *Religion for Atheists*, by *Alain de Botton*: as humanists we have no need to reinvent the wheel. We are free to incorporate the more compatible elements of religion into our humanist worldview.

### UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

For most, religion is not primarily a matter of intellect or reasoning, but rather an approach which places great importance on religious experience and feeling.

Few people are ever reasoned from non-belief to belief. Religions also offer some consolation and hope of an afterlife in the face of death. This provides comfort for many. It can be difficult for non-religious people to understand the importance, power and meaning that religion brings into people's lives.

### THE FUTURE OF RELIGION

Research suggests that the number of non-religious people will grow in countries such as the United States and France.

It is worth noting however that there is at least a possibility that the statistics on religious belief are somewhat distorted as most places where populations are growing fast remain generally religious and without the freedom to express belief, so amongst many populations there may be significantly more people who are not religious than is suggested.

### DIALOGUE WITH THEISTS

It is important that people with different world views are able to talk with each other well. Good principles for good conversations include trying to understand another person's perspective and look for common ground.

Philip Kitcher on humanist dialogue.

'A secular worldview ought to be forged in dialogue, even in passionate interaction, with all that has been most deeply thought about what it is to be human – including whatever can be refined out of religious traditions. For secular humanism is only secondarily secular: it is primarily humane.' *From: Life After Faith, The Case for Secular Humanism*

### FURTHER READING

*Religion for Atheists*, Alain de Botton (2013)

*Life After Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism*, Philip Kitcher (2016)

*The Sea of Faith*, Don Cupitt (2010)

*From Apostle to Apostate: The Story of the Clergy Project*, Catherine Dunphy (2015)

*The book of dead philosophers*, Simon Critchley (2011)

### THOUGHTS ON OUR NEXT SESSION

#### SESSION 5 - WHAT WE OWE EACH OTHER, A HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

We live in a world which is interconnected and unequal.

What might humanists identify as the most pressing issues?

How important are human rights? What are they?

How tolerant are we?

Why might humanism and secularism be important?

Are we each responsible and accountable?

How can we help improve the world?

# SESSION 5

## WHAT WE OWE EACH OTHER, A HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

*"Humanism is about the world, not about humanism." – Harold Blackham (1903-2009)*

### CONCERN FOR OUR PLANET AND HUMAN LIVES

Climate change and habitat loss are threatening wild animals with extinction. Despite improvements in living standards for millions of people, issues about equality.

Humanist thinking insists that we are accountable for our own actions and have to take responsibility both individually and collectively.

### WHICH ISSUES NEED ATTENTION

UN Sustainable Development Goals came into force in January 2016 setting out 17 goals tackling the issues that affect our world.

Engaging constructively in the world around us is a source of deep satisfaction, gives meaning and purpose, contributes to improving the world and contributes to our self-esteem and our sense of well-being.

Being responsible means that we have to try and make things better and that ultimately means that we are accountable. We are accountable for our own and for future generations.

### HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies 'the foremost statement of the rights and freedoms of all human beings'. It stipulates 30 'Articles' which give us a benchmark against which we can measure our progress.

### PROGRESS AND OPTIMISM

The world has many problems. It is grossly unfair and unequal. But there has been some very significant progress. On a macro scale, there are signs of improvement and some degree of convergence. We need some sense of hope else we may give up.

### ECOLOGY

Ultimately humans cannot live without a viable planet to live on. If this planet is harmed beyond the point at which it can continue to support human life, all other problems become irrelevant.

We are part of an intricate, complex web of life. Yet sometimes when we discuss the environment, we separate it from people. For people who live closer to nature the state of the environment is a life threatening concern - our actions and inactions threaten their existence. We are accountable.

### HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROTECTING THE PLANET

If human rights can't be achieved for all and global equality remains out of reach, then urgent environmental matters are likely to remain unprioritised and unsolved. We must ensure that human rights are upheld to advance progress in both the global wellbeing of the natural world and for all human beings.

### TOLERANCE AND ACTION

There are many things getting in the way of real change, but intolerance is certainly one. It prevents the co-operation that is crucial to tackle the complex issues we face. If we identify intolerance we are duty bound to try and deal with it. Segregation by race, gender, faith/belief or sexual orientation helps to foster intolerance and prejudice attitudes.

### ENGAGING WITH THE ISSUES

If humanism is truly about the world it must try to energise us all to engage with the world and fight the apathy that seems to have infected the developed nations.

If we accept responsibility and accountability, then we have to act to make the world a fairer place. The lives of others near and far can impact us all, as well as future generations.

### FURTHER READING

*Half the Sky (How to change the world)*, Nicholas Kristof & Sheryl WuDunn (2009)

*Environmental Protection & Human Rights*, Donald K Anton, Dinah Shelton (2011)

*Beyond Borders: Thinking Critically about Global Issues* – Paula S Rothenberg (2005)

*Enlightenment now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* – Steven Pinker (2018)

### THOUGHTS ON OUR NEXT SESSION

#### SESSION 6 - HUMANISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Is there such a thing as humanist spirituality?

Do humanists meditate?

Pastoral care for non-religious people, humanism in the community.

Communal celebration, ritual and humanism.

Personal reflection, working together, living well and sources of guidance.

Summary of the sessions.

Looking to the future - individuals and communities.

## SESSION 6

# HUMANIST SPIRITUALITY & EVERYDAY LIFE

### HUMANIST SPIRITUALITY

What is spirituality? It is connected to how we actively and consciously develop and enact our deepest values and beliefs.

‘When people talk about a spiritual experience they point to the combined sensation of awe, inner peace, and enlightenment, which culminates in a reverence for life and nature, and a sincere self-reflection about these things and oneself. And yet that, too, is the experience of any true philosopher.’ *Richard Carrier, Sense and Goodness Without God.*

### RELIGIOUS PRACTICE THAT MAY HELP

There are tools that may help us in life - some of which emanate from a religious practice. Scientific studies have shown that meditation has a moderate effect on levels of anxiety, depression, and pain. For many people meditation is a pleasurable experience.

Mindfulness can help us attain a deeper sense of self-awareness and detaching ourselves to a degree which may help with critical thinking.

### HUMANISM IN THE COMMUNITY

Many humanists help in food banks and soup kitchens, help run societies, help raise funds, and help build community projects. Non-religious people help their communities in many ways as individuals, in conjunction with secular groups and charities such as the Red Cross, Crisis, Mind, and Action Aid. Non-religious people can also be found working in charitable projects run by religious groups. Infact, surveys suggest that non-religious participation in charities is equal to that of religious participation.

### NON-RELIGIOUS PASTORAL SUPPORT

Humanists UK now has several volunteers offering pastoral support in a range of institutions alongside religious people. These volunteers are part of what is known as the Non Religious Pastoral Care Network.

Non-religious patients or prisoners often face the same fears, hopes, anguish, questions of meaning and purpose, sense of loss and bereavement as religious patients or prisoners.

### COMMUNAL CEREMONY AND RITUAL

It is good to mark life's big events and sometimes feels good to join in a communal act. There are humanist celebrants who conduct funerals, weddings and namings. There are a growing number of opportunities for secular approaches - not all are run by humanists. Sunday Assembly Movement, Coming of Age Ceremonies, Death Cafés etc

### RE-VISIT A DEFINITION OF HUMANISM

“Humanism is the philosophy that you should be a good guest at the dinner table of life”.  
A.C. Grayling.

In some ways humanism is a hard option because there are no simple rules. Some things will work for some humanists but not for others. Because humanists don't believe in an afterlife, we live positively, behave ethically and take responsibility for our actions without expectation of rewards or punishment from a supernatural power. We do this because it helps us live confident, happy and fulfilling lives. We find inspiration in philosophy and can apply these teachings to our own lives. This can be liberating and enriching.

### HOW CAN WE SAVOUR THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE?

Take time each day to reflect on the simple, remarkable fact that we exist - recognise that our time in the sun is short and we should make the most of it.

### HUMAN COOPERATION

We know when humans get together they can make better decisions and produce outcomes greater than the sum of their individual parts.

Whatever we choose to do - if we keep mind and body well as much as possible it will help.

### SHAPING THE FUTURE

As we lurch towards the future, humankind has an opportunity to help shape a better world...will we take it. A humanist perspective can surely help humanity to seek a better future for all life.

### FURTHER READING

*Living Well*, Richard Docwra  
([humanism.org.uk/humanism/the-big-questions](http://humanism.org.uk/humanism/the-big-questions))

*Waking up - A Guide to Spirituality without religion*, Sam Harris (2014)

*Sense and Goodness Without God*, Richard Carrier (2005)

*Life, Sex and Ideas: The Good Life without God*, A.C. Grayling (2001)

# EVALUATION

**Please complete and return this form to help us continue to improve the One Life Sessions.**

Where asked to 'score' an answer please rate 1 - 5 with 1 being low (poor/do not agree) and 5 being high (good/strongly agree).

QUESTION	BRIEF COMMENTS	Score (1-5)
Did the sessions give you a good overview of humanism and humanist thought?		
Was six sessions the right number of sessions?		
Did you find the presentations engaging and informative?		
Were the briefing notes helpful?		
Did the speakers engage you well?		
Were discussions useful?		
Was the venue adequate?		
Did you find there was anything missing? Were there any topic(s) that you would like to be included/expanded upon?		

QUESTION	BRIEF COMMENTS	SCORE (1-5)
Would you like to get more involved in local activities aimed at humanists?		
Would you recommend the sessions to a friend?		
Please use this space to add any further comments.		
Which session(s) did you attend?		
What worked well throughout the sessions?		
What could be improved?		
Other comments?		
<p>If you wish to identify yourself please give your name and contact details below: This is absolutely not required but if you do give your details we may contact you for further information and can supply further information on your local humanist group as and when this is available.</p>		
<p>May we contact you for further information in relation to your experience of the One Life Sessions? Yes/No</p>		

