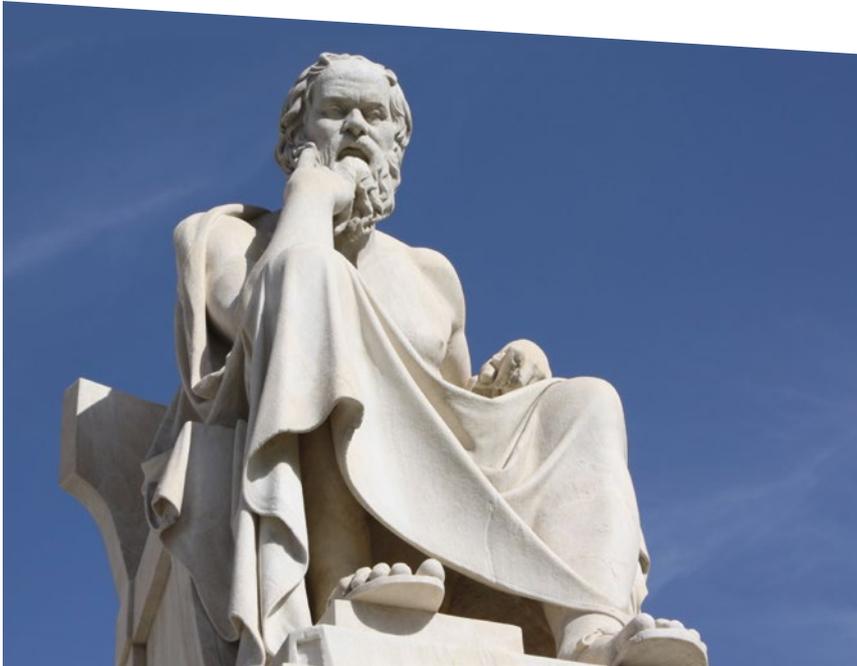


Humanism on...

Philosophical Questions



This resource will help you understand, explore and analyse a humanist perspective on a range of philosophical questions including the origins of the universe, the origins of life, creationism, the existence of God, the problem of suffering and evil, and the existence of miracles. This will be helpful for those studying the Higher, National 5 or National 4 RMPS unit Religious and Philosophical Questions.

Other resources are available for teachers and students studying RME/RMPS in Scotland.

We also have trained volunteers who can visit your school and answer questions on Humanism. To find out more visit:
www.humanism.scot/education

We are always happy to answer questions for pupils who are completing their Added Value Unit or any other coursework and are looking for a Humanist response.

Please email admin@humanism.scot your questions.

Key Learning Outcomes

Humanists are people who are not religious and look for real life evidence to help answer philosophical questions.

Humanism does not have a creation myth or story and holds that the origin of the universe can only be explained by scientific enquiry.

Humanists believe that humans evolved from primordial forms of life and subscribe to Darwin's theory of evolution.

Humanists reject the proof offered by creationists as pseudoscience, and they reject all philosophical arguments for the existence of God as flawed and based on incorrect assumptions.

Humanists believe that humans have free will over their actions, even taking into account constraining factors such as biological or sociological determinants.

Humanists do not believe that the laws of nature can be broken and therefore do not believe in the existence of miracles.

This resource was developed by Humanist Society Scotland.

Higher/National 4&5 RMPS.

Who Are Humanists?

Humanism is a non-religious viewpoint. Humanists are people who form their views on moral issues through gathering evidence.

They use **reason and think critically** about what they find to make decisions. Humanists don't have a central "authority" on right and wrong – there is no sacred text or leader of Humanists. Instead Humanism is a **way of thinking rather than a religion**. Because of this, Humanists will sometimes disagree with each other over the right answer to key problems.

Humanists, however, share an understanding that our world is best understood through **science, observation and rational enquiry** rather than accepting supernatural explanations that cannot be tested. Humanists also share an understanding that our decisions should **not unfairly impact on others**. Humanists think we are all ultimately responsible for our actions and future.

Understand

1. How does a Humanist differ in the way they would make a moral decision in comparison to people of religious groups you have studied?
2. What would a Humanist consider when making a moral decision?
3. How do you decide what is right and wrong?

Explore

1. Research and find out some information about a famous Humanist. Create a poster with facts about their life. See if you can find a quote they have said about a moral issue.
2. Create a survey to ask your class how they decide what is right and wrong. You might ask them if religion plays a part in this process, although make sure you keep the answers anonymous. Put your findings together in a chart.

Analyse

1. Create a table of similarities and differences between Humanists and Christians.
2. In a group/pair discuss the following statements a Humanist might make about how they make moral decisions. What does each one tell you about Humanists?
 - "We are all responsible for our own life, we can't expect someone else to make decisions for us."
 - "I look at a wide range of art, books, films as well as science to understand how life works."
 - "I find not knowing the answer to every single question inspiring and makes me want to discover more."



Members of Humanist Society Scotland campaigning for the law to change on same-sex marriage in 2014

Origins of the Universe

Almost all religions have a **creation story** that ‘explains’ how the Earth and life on Earth was created in line with their religious beliefs. Humanists use **science** rather than a creation story to explain the origins of Earth and life on Earth because they do not believe in gods or a supernatural force that created the world. Instead, humanists view the origin of the universe as something that should be subject to constant **scientific enquiry** until conclusive evidence is established.

Humanists believe that we should seek **scientific explanations** to explore the origins of our universe. The world is made out of material matter, and humanists believe that by looking at **natural forces and physical laws** we can trace back to the origins of this matter.

The Big Bang theory is currently the most widely accepted scientific explanation for the origin of the universe. According to the Big Bang theory, **matter, space and time** all came into being through a moment of initial expansion about 14,000 billion years ago. What **caused** the Big Bang itself, we still do not know.

However, the Big Bang theory is still debated among physicists. There are numerous **different scientific models** in circulation that are constantly altered, debated, and questioned through scientific experiment. Humanists believe in the **scientific method** as opposed to a **specific** scientific model or explanation, and can therefore have **conflicting opinions** on the origin of the universe.

Humanist Profiles

Name: Jim Al-Khalili

Occupation: Professor of Theoretical Physics



“For me, to simply say ‘it is so wonderful, it must have been designed by a Creator’ is to avoid the issue. After all, who then designed the creator? Just stating that things are the way they are because God made them that way doesn’t satisfy me. The difference between my beliefs and having a religious faith is that I am prepared to change my views in light of new evidence. I want the deeper truth: I see a beauty in the laws of nature that can be explained by science. Science gives me tools to find answers.

Understand

1. What makes the Big Bang theory different from a religious creation story? Can you think of any similarities between religious creation stories and scientific theories for the origins of the universe?
2. Read Jim Al-Khalili’s profile. Based on the quote, do you think scientists are more certain about the origin of the universe than religious believers?

Explore

1. There are other scientific theories that compete with the Big Bang theory. Can you find any examples of these alternative theories?
2. Can you find three sources of empirical evidence that support the Big Bang theory?

Analyse

1. Do you think we will ever find conclusive evidence for the Big Bang theory?
2. Do you think the Big Bang theory could be compatible with a creationist or religious view on the origin of the universe?

Origins of Life

Humanists do not believe in the divine creation of life and instead subscribe to the theory of evolution.

Charles Darwin was the first scientist to popularise the theory of evolution. He found evidence for his theory that life was not created but instead **evolved** out of **primordial** forms of life on his five year scientific discovery voyage to South America and the Galapagos Islands on HMS Beagle.

Through coincidental **genetic mutations** that are reproduced over many generations, some life forms are **better adapted** to their natural circumstances, thus increasing their **chances of survival**. This process is called **natural selection**.

Mutations that prove to be **functional** result in changes to a species. For example, giraffes that inherited a mutation causing a longer neck survived better than their shorter-necked counterparts as they could reach higher in trees and had greater access to the leaves they eat. This mutation eventually caused the short-necked giraffes to become **extinct**, whilst their long-necked relatives survived. This principle is called **survival of the fittest**.

Species evolve in many ways and become more **complex** over time, thus creating a **variety of life forms**. This process is not **teleological**, meaning that it does not happen with purpose, but is **blind and coincidental**. Humanists believe that humans, as well as all other animals, are a product of evolution.

Humanist Profiles

Name: Alice Roberts

Occupation: Biological anthropologist, TV presenter, author, and President of Humanists UK



“Just as your own existence is unlikely and far from inevitable, the evolution of modern humans as a species depended on a whole string of chance events – some happening in the environments our ancestors inhabited, and some inside their own bodies, including random mutations in their DNA.”

Understand

1. Why is the process of evolution often described as ‘blind’?
2. The existence of fossils is seen as evidence for evolution theory. Why do you think this is?

Explore

1. What kind of criticism did Darwin’s theory of evolution face when first published, and do you think it still faces this kind of criticism?
2. Find out about the ‘Scopes Trial’ in America in 1924 when a teacher was put on trial for teaching evolution in school.

Analyse

1. Evolutionary theory suggests that humans are ‘a mere product’ of evolution. Do you think there is anything that sets humans apart from other living things?
2. Evolutionary ideas imply that biological needs are important drivers for all species. Would a humanist agree with the argument that all of our actions are determined by biological factors?

Creationism

Creationism is based on the religious belief that the origins of the universe and life are the results of supernatural acts undertaken by a divine being or beings. Humanists find this explanation of the universe and life unsatisfactory and incompatible with their scientific worldview.

New creationist movements (sometimes called **Intelligent Design** theorists) try to find proof for the **validity** of divine creation and religious stories, and reject the validity of evolutionary and **Big Bang** theory. Many creationists believe that the Earth is around 10,000 years old, and some creationists have set up research organisations to prove the creation story in the Bible.

Humanists think that the ‘proof’ presented by these research groups does not meet the standard of **objectivity** necessary in scientific exploration, and consequently the ‘evidence’ produced does not meet the rigorous standards of proof required in science and is in fact **pseudoscience**.

Humanists do not agree that the Bible (or other religious texts) is a reliable primary source on which to build scientific knowledge. For humanists, science (and scientific sources) must be **evidence-based**, **rational** and **universal**, with a methodology that is **enquiry-based**, and **reproducible**.

Creationism in Scottish Schools

In 2015 the Scottish education minister stated that creationism should not be taught in science classes in publicly funded Scottish schools. This statement was in response to a petition to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Secular Society after it emerged that there had been cases of Christian fundamentalists handing out creationist literature in Scottish schools.

The Scottish minister stated that creationism is not a “scientific principle [and] it should therefore not be taught as part of science lessons.”

Humanists across the world have campaigned to ban the teaching of creationism as a scientific theory in schools. For example in 2014 Humanists UK succeeded in getting a law passed that forbids the teaching of creationism in English schools. The theory of evolution is taught in most schools across the globe. There are still some religious fundamentalists groups and individuals that oppose teaching children the theory of evolution, but this is very rarely supported by law.

Understand

1. How do creationists explain the origins of the universe?
2. Why is the Bible not a reliable scientific source for humanists?

Explore

1. Humanists describe creationism as pseudoscience.
 - a. What is pseudoscience?
 - b. Can you find other examples of pseudoscientific theories?
 - c. Why might someone mistake creationism for science?
2. Find out about the Dover vs Kitzmiller trial in the USA in 2005 when the teaching of creationism as science was banned in a number of high schools.

Analyse

1. Do you think governments should ban the teaching of creationism outside of a religious context?
2. Think of reasons a creationist might give for teaching creationism. How would a humanist respond to those arguments?

The Existence of God

The Cosmological Argument

The **cosmological argument** for the existence of God was developed by the medieval theologian and philosopher St Thomas Aquinas. The argument states that because everything that exists must have a **cause** for existing, there must be a previous cause for everything around us. Aquinas argued that if we follow this reasoning back in time there must be a **first cause**, and that first cause can only be **God**.

Humanists do not accept the cosmological argument because they do not regard the proof that Aquinas offers of a 'first cause' as scientific. Scientific proof requires **research** and **evidence**, whereas Aquinas's 'proof' in the cosmological argument is merely **philosophical**. If there was a first cause there is no logical reason to conclude that it is a supreme being, or in fact that it is a being at all.

Interestingly, the cosmological argument can be altered to support a humanist way of thinking if we identify the **Big Bang** as the first cause as opposed to God. For this reason, we can see that the cosmological argument as a **proof** of God's existence is not philosophically valid, because it is not **absolutely** true.

Humanist Viewpoint

"In vain, therefore, should we pretend to determine any single event, or infer any cause and effect, without the assistance of observation and experience."

David Hume, Scottish Philosopher

Hume is regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the **Enlightenment period** and his writing has influenced many other philosophers and scientists. However, some of his writings contain overt racism which have led to some asking if it's appropriate to celebrate him with statues for example.



Understand

1. Reconstruct the different steps of the cosmological argument. How many steps do you have?
2. Can you find any assumptions in the argument, i.e. beliefs that you need to hold in order for the argument to work?

Explore

1. Immanuel Kant also developed an important critique on the cosmological argument. Can you summarise his argument?
2. Read about David Hume and the recent debate about the statues and buildings in his honour. How does learning about his racist views make you feel about him and his work?

Analyse

1. Read the quote from philosopher David Hume. What role does observation play in the cosmological argument?
2. Can you think of anything that has been scientifically proven without observation and experience?

The Teleological Argument

The teleological argument was first put forward by the philosopher William Paley in 1802 to prove the existence of God. The argument is also known as the argument of **intelligent design**, or the **watchmaker's analogy**.

Imagine you found a watch in a forest that you unscrew to see inside. You notice that the workings of the clock inside seem so meticulously **structured** that you would not question whether the pieces came together by sheer coincidence. Furthermore, you would not expect to find a watch (something perfectly designed for its purpose) randomly in a forest unless it was placed there. For these reasons, you conclude that the watch was **created** and **placed** in the forest.

The teleological argument says that we can say the same about our world: everything in the natural world seems so perfectly **ordered** that this can not be the product of a **blind** process. Rather, everything clearly serves a **purpose**, and this purpose must be created, and the creator must be God.

Humanists regard the teleological argument as a **pseudoscientific** argument. Although it seems to draw on **empirical reality** (the complexity of the natural world) this argument doesn't offer a **testable** claim. It is also not **self-evident**: the complexity of the universe can be explained by other theories, for example by **evolution**. There is no **evidence** for the teleological argument, but there is empirical evidence for evolution theory.

Humanist Profiles

Name: Abby Hafer

Occupation: Humanist writer and scientist



“I say that if indeed everything was designed, then the Designer would get an ‘F’ in any decent design class. The design of our eyes actually impedes our sight because the “wiring” of nerves is placed in front of the photoreceptors. These photoreceptors are crucial because they recognize light and discern the world around us. If other animals, such as the cuttlefish, can have the wiring in the back, why is ours in the front? It seems like a poor choice, unless “the creator,” which intelligent design points to, favours squids and octopi over humans.

Understand

1. How is the natural world comparable to a watch? Can you think of any natural examples of complex structures?
2. According to humanists evolution is a better way to understand the complexity of the natural world. Why?

Explore

1. Abby Hafer uses the human eye as an example of ‘unintelligent design’. Can you find other examples?
2. Exchange your examples of ‘unintelligent design’ with a classmate. Can any examples be explained by evolution theory?

Analyse

1. What do you think is the ultimate purpose of things, according to believers in the teleological argument?
2. Scientists sometimes talk about ‘purpose.’ Is this definition of purpose different to the purpose implied by the intelligent designer’s argument?

The Problem of Suffering and Evil

Free will

Humanists believe that people have **free will** over their actions. They do not think that our actions are **predestined** or determined by an **external force**. People are the agents of their own behaviour, which makes them **responsible** for their actions. Humanists believe that all human beings should be **free** to live their lives as they want to, as long as their actions do not cause **harm** to others. They don't believe that our actions are **judged** by a god or measured by an external force; our actions only affect this world and the people that live in it.

Although some humanists believe that our actions are determined by **social** or **biological** factors, most humanists believe that this is only partially the case. Despite constraining circumstances, they believe that all people have a certain degree of **agency** as well. Humanists value the **personal worth** of the individual, as well as the **centrality of human values** and the **creative, active nature of human beings**. Humanists also believe that all people are **responsible** for their own actions. Although humanists do not follow a set of rules that set out what is right and wrong, humanists try to do the right thing based on **evidence**. Humanists try to **think critically** and **use reason** to make the 'right' decisions.

Humanist Profiles

Name: Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Occupation: Philosopher and Writer



“ In a famous essay, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre argued for the ultimate freedom of human beings. He argued that objects are created according to a blueprint that determines their function, whereas human beings are born into the world in an undetermined way – they must create their own purpose. This does not mean that everybody should behave as they please, but because we have free will we are ultimately responsible for our actions.

According to Sartre many people fear the consequences of being responsible for their actions, and instead of taking responsibility they explain events in their lives through natural causes or other external factors. Sartre calls this attitude 'bad faith', and in his essay implores people to take responsibility for their actions.



Understand

1. Why does free will imply individual responsibility?
2. How can critical thinking help in decision making?

Explore

1. Scientists have tried to prove the existence or nonexistence of free will through experiments. Try and find some examples and their conclusions.
2. Philosophers have critiqued these 'empirical' experiments on free will. Try and find some philosophical critiques. What is their argument?

Analyse

1. Do you think it is possible to find proof for free will?
2. According to Sartre people have free will but objects do not. What do you think he would say about animals?

Determinism

According to a **deterministic** view, our actions are controlled by an **external force**. Although we might feel as if we have free will, this is an **illusion**. Humanists generally do not adhere to a deterministic point of view. There are different versions of determinism. Some religious people believe that all our actions are **predestined** by God. Others believe that our actions are controlled by some other supernatural force. There are **non-religious** forms of determinism as well such as **astrology**.

Social determinism is the idea that all of our actions are determined by our social surroundings. **Economic class, nationality, culture and history** are examples of social factors that determine how we think and how we act. People disagree as to how much these factors **influence** our thoughts and behaviour. Some people think that they fully control our lives, whereas others think they only **partially** shape our perspective.

Biological determinism is the idea that our actions are determined by our biological make-up – our **consciousness** is the by-product of our physical nature and our actions are in fact controlled by our **genes**, our **hormones** and **natural drives**.

Not all biologists are biological determinists, and not all social scientists are social determinists. Many scientists think that we are in charge of our own actions and that social and biological factors are **constraints** that have some effect on our actions, but are not controlling forces that govern our deeds.

Evidence in Action

For a long time some scientists thought that if we could identify all the forces at work on a person we would be able to accurately predict their behaviour. This theory was based on a **mechanical** worldview.

This theory suggested that just as the outcome of throwing a dice is explained as **chance**, if you could calculate all the **forces** working on the dice you would be able to **accurately predict** what number it would land on after each throw. Similarly a person's behaviour might appear unconstrained, but if all the forces acting on a person could be identified, we may see that their actions are a **cumulative** result of these forces, and not their own free will.

This theory has been significantly undermined by **quantum mechanics**. According to quantum science the most basic constituents of matter sometimes behave in an unpredictable way. This **non deterministic** worldview has been used as an argument to support the idea of free will in humans by some scientists and philosophers. According to some thinkers, 'The more we know about our universe, the more difficult it becomes to believe in determinism'.



Understand

1. What factors influence our behaviour according to social determinists?
2. Do you agree with biological determinists when they claim that consciousness is a by-product of our physical make up?

Explore

1. The claims of biological determinism have been tested by doing research on identical twins. Why would scientists study twins instead of siblings?
2. Find some research on identical twins and determinism. What were the findings?

Analyse

1. Do you feel like you are more influenced by your social environment, or by your genetic nature?
2. Read the evidence in action section. Do you think science can provide the proof for a free will?

Responsibility

Humanists think we are all **responsible** for our own actions. Humanists think everybody is **equal** and believe all people should have the same **opportunities**.

Although humanists think all people are equal, they do not think that everybody has **equal chances** in life. Some people are more **constrained** by their environment for example than others, making it harder for them to **realise** their goals.

Humanists believe in **creating equal opportunities** for everyone. They believe that as long as inequality exists, some people will be unfairly constrained and therefore cannot be held fully **accountable** for their actions or for the outcome of their life.

People experiencing poverty, violence, or other hardships are likely to be **shaped** or **constrained** by these conditions. Evidence shows that inequality **reinforces** and **perpetuates** itself. Humanists think that we should try and understand the **reasons** behind certain behaviours, rather than judging or punishing people without seeing the whole picture.

Responsibility is a **complex** issue, and humanists argue that rather than holding people fully accountable for their crimes, we must consider the role that an unfair system played in creating conditions for crime. Humanists try not to **unfairly judge others**. Instead, they take **responsibility** for their own actions, and try to achieve whatever is in the reach of their own limits, as well as helping others to do the same.

Humanist Profiles

Name: Noam Chomsky

Occupation: Linguist, philosopher, social critic, humanist



“Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, it’s unlikely you will step up and take responsibility for making it so. If you assume that there’s no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, there are opportunities to change things, there’s a chance you may contribute to making a better world. The choice is yours.”



Understand

1. How does a humanist perspective on responsibility differ from some of the religious perspectives you studied?
2. Humanists hold that we are all responsible for our own actions, yet some people might have more responsibility than others. Do you agree?

Explore

1. What is a self-fulfilling prophecy?
2. From what age do you think people are fully responsible for their own actions?

Analyse

1. Do you agree with the humanist idea that we are in part responsible for the happiness of others?

Miracles

A **miracle** can be understood as an event or an occurrence that seems to **break the laws of nature**. Often events that are described as ‘miracles’ are attributed to a **supernatural** cause, such as the interference in human life by a god or gods. Humanists do not believe that the laws of nature can be broken, or that supernatural beings exist who can affect events on Earth. For this reason humanists do not believe in miracles.

Coincidence

Many events that people describe as miraculous would be explained by humanists as the result of **coincidence**, where a set of events and circumstances happen in a combination that creates an **unexpected and unlikely** event. The explanation for these unlikely coincidences is more likely to be explained as a miracle if the outcome is **happy**. Examples of this type of miracle could be a plane crash where everyone survives, or a hurricane that leaves a home untouched in a devastated neighbourhood.

Laws of Nature

The second type of miracle was described by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume as, “a *transgression of the laws of nature by a particular volition of deity*”. This means believing that an event has occurred that goes against the laws of nature because a supernatural being such as a god has **willed it into action**. Examples of this kind of miracle are often found in **religious texts**, such as Bible stories like Moses parting the Red Sea or Jesus rising from the dead.



Humanist Profiles

Name:

Thomas Jefferson
(1743-1826)

Occupation:

Third President of the
United States

“ Thomas Jefferson removed all mentions of miracles from his copy of the Bible (known as *The Jefferson Bible*) to align with his enlightenment sentiments. Like humanists, Jefferson did not believe in miracles because he believed that the violation of natural law was an impossibility.

He believed that one should focus on the moral and philosophical aspect of life, rather than on inexplicable miracles, he therefore created a Bible that focused on Jesus’s moral teaching rather than his mystical and miraculous abilities.

Arguments Against the Existence of Miracles

Numerous arguments have been put forward against the existence of miracles that support the humanist belief that miracles cannot and do not happen. Thinkers such as Richard Dawkins have argued that all miracles are really just coincidences – there are 7 billion people in the world, therefore **countless** opportunities for coincidences to arise every single day. This argument is often called **The Law of Very Large Numbers**.

Fourth century philosopher and theologian St Augustine said, “*Miracles happen not in opposition to nature but in opposition to what we know of nature.*” Although St Augustine was a religious man, this is a humanist argument against the existence of miracles. Humanists argue that when events occur that seem to **transgress or contradict** the laws of nature, it is because we do not yet fully understand the **rational explanation** that explains how the phenomena (or ‘miracle’) fits with the law of nature.

The Scottish Philosopher David Hume wrote one of the most famous pieces of modern philosophy in which he **argued against the existence of miracles**. Hume was an **empiricist** which means he believed knowledge comes from **direct experience**. He argued that if you saw what you thought was a miracle (an occurrence where the laws of nature are broken) the evidence for the miracle would have to be **stronger** than all of the other times you saw the law of nature **behave as it should**. If there are more incidences of the law of nature working, Hume argued, what you actually saw was a **trick or an illusion**. So, for example, to believe that you saw the miracle of a man raised from the dead once, you would have to believe that this evidence outweighed the billions of people who have died and stayed dead. Humanists share Hume’s view that miracles can only be proven by **incontrovertible evidence**, which so far has not happened.

The definition of a miracle relies on a belief in a god or supernatural power that can **alter the laws of nature** to create the miracle. Humanists do not believe in gods or supernatural beings because there is no **evidence** for them in science; humanists therefore do not believe that miracles can happen. Humanists also argue that there is no **scientific evidence** that the **laws of nature** can be suspended, so there is no evidence that miracles have happened, or could ever happen. Humanist explanations of miracles and miraculous events rely on **science and logic**, and focus on looking for **rational and scientifically provable explanations** for events that seem to be unexplained by science and reason.



Understand

1. What are the two types of miracles? How do they differ?
2. List three reasons why humanists do not believe in miracles.

Explore

1. Find out about the *Templeton Foundation Prayer Study*. What can the results tell us about ‘miraculous’ recoveries in patients because of prayer?
2. In pairs find an example of a ‘miracle’ that breaks the laws of nature. One of you must explain the event supernaturally, and the other scientifically.

Analyse

1. Given that many religions claim miracles are evidence for the existence of their god, can miracles be argued to prove the existence of any specific god or supernatural being?
2. Are there any weaknesses to the humanist explanation of miracles?

Humanism and the Miraculous

Although humanists do not believe in miracles, they can appreciate a **sense of the miraculous** – the joy of children cured of cancer by drug treatments available because of **scientific endeavour**, survivors of natural disasters who are saved by **tenacious rescue teams** who search long after hope has faded, or **natural phenomena** like the Northern Lights or volcanic lightning. Instead of miracles, humanists have **hope and faith in people** and believe that science holds the answers. Humanist views of miracles are reflected in some religious viewpoints, for example pagan religions that see ‘god’ as being synonymous with nature, and religious people who prioritise scientific explanations of events over **religious myth making** and miraculous explanations.



Understand

1. In pairs create a list of reasons why Hume thinks it unlikely that miracles exist.
2. When might a religious and non-religious view of miracles be compatible?

Explore

1. Find a recent news story that calls an event a miracle. Write a paragraph explaining why a humanist would not think it was a miracle.
2. Find out what atheists say about miracles. What does their description add to your understanding of a humanist perspective on miracles?

Analyse

1. Can you find any evidence of a miracle that has been scientifically confirmed?
2. Might a humanist ever understand something to be a ‘miracle’?

Humanist Profiles

Name: David Hume (1711-1776)

Occupation: Philosopher

“When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.