

**RMPS - Int 2 and Higher**

**Morality in the  
Modern World:  
Humanism**

**Teacher and Student  
Guide**

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**Humanist Academy**



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## Introduction

This pack provides teachers and students of Religious and Moral Education the opportunity to gain an insight into Humanism. It describes Humanism's principles, beliefs and values while explaining the Humanist approach to some modern moral issues covered in the MMW course at Intermediate 2 and Higher levels.

The discussions offered here are not comprehensive, but on those issues where there is consensus amongst Humanists, they do provide a broad outline of the Humanist perspective.

Humanism asserts that humankind is responsible for its own success or failure, so that outside of the physical and natural laws of the universe, the future of humanity rests in humanity's own hands. As part of this future, the five issues discussed in this resource should concern everyone.

The question of morality is at the core of Humanism and Humanists would urge everyone to engage in a 21st century dialogue about it. Humanists believe that if humanity is to survive and successfully organise its societies with the maximum spread of a rewarding life for all, then morality will be a fundamental part of this endeavour whether it takes place at national level, in groups or individually.

Although Humanism has no prescribed texts, it values and promotes a wide collection of literature written by Humanist thinkers worldwide - some even deriving from ancient civilisations. From this store of writing, Humanism has been able to define its outlook, its philosophical drive and its set of guiding principles.

Humanists have always valued intellectual integrity and the benefits of the most reliable and sound knowledge available. So, before deciding on any issue, all Humanists would seek out and consider all relevant evidence without preconceptions regarding its conclusions.

The fundamental principles of Humanism were laid out by the IHEU in the Amsterdam Declaration in 1952 which was updated at the World Humanist Congress in Amsterdam in 2002. That declaration is repeated in Appendix 1.

## Section 1: Crime and Punishment

### Laws

If communities are to grow and prosper in relative harmony, those who live within them need to accept the responsibility of being a member of that community and obeying its laws. Such laws usually exist for the common good, and help to provide order and security for everyone. Just as necessary, through perhaps less devastating in their effects, are the rules of social etiquette that remain at the discretion of the individual.

Since, the ultimate objective of drawing up laws is to create a society that benefits everyone, and crimes are actions that diminish the quality of life for everyone, it's in everyone's interest to take steps to reduce crime.

But, when people break the law societies have to decide what to do with them. Over the centuries different societies have had different ways of dealing with offenders. Humanists believe that although breaking laws is serious, measures to deal with offenders should always reflect the severity of the offence - that is, the punishment should always 'fit the crime'.

Also, for social justice to be fair and effective laws must be parallel to the intellectual understanding of the time and appropriate to the locations in which they operate. In the 21st century, it's the mark of a civilised nation to have proportionate, just and humane laws.

When human knowledge and understanding changes, laws usually re-align with this new understanding, for example, British laws regarding child labour, divorce and discrimination have expanded and adapted to changes in how modern societies think about these issues. Another example is laws based on religious belief (like the blasphemy laws taken off the statute books in 2008). Such laws only cause confusion, and conflict between believers and non-believers. Instead, laws that define crime and punishment need to be based on sound and up-to-date knowledge about the world and be applicable to everyone equally.

## **The purpose of punishment: On what grounds can punishment be morally justified?**

To answer this question, the reasons behind punishment must be considered, and people have different views on this. Many reasons for punishment are often underpinned by one philosophical view but, more often than not, attitudes to punishment emerge as a mixture of views from different philosophical stances. We give below an outline on some of the most common reasons for and against inflicting punishment. This outline includes concepts like Deterrence and Rehabilitation that arise from philosophical theories like Retributivism and Utilitarianism. The Humanist view relating to these positions is provided.

The idea of **retributive** justice considers that victims have a right to retribution (revenge or payback) and also perhaps the idea that the criminal deserves to be punished. This retributive stance (often identified by the word 'deserves') frequently includes the notion of revenge. Humanists believe that emotional responses like that of revenge can sway or cloud effective judgement and that vengeance cannot be beneficial except in a negative way. So, as a reason for punishment, revenge does not feature highly in the Humanist outlook.

The **rehabilitation** reason for punishment asserts that by detaining offenders and providing opportunities for their further education provides them with a better chance to find employment when they are released and in many cases has proved to avoid further criminal activity.

Aspects like rehabilitation feature centrally in some Utilitarian attitudes to punishment because these outcomes bring about the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people (a common Utilitarian precept). Humanist views align closely with this type of view. Some Utilitarian theories challenge the retributive argument - claiming that punishment with no obvious or proven positive outcome is ineffective and only increases the overall amount of suffering. Thus, in both Humanist and Utilitarian terms, punishment is only justified in terms of the consequences that result.

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Other reasons for punishment centre on the **deterrent** argument the essence of which is that when offenders are seen to be punished severely, others will be deterred from committing the same offence and thus society will be safer. This argument also includes the **protection** reason for punishment. The 'revolving doors' syndrome - where offenders are released only to commit more offences and get put back in prison again - is a sign that incarceration does not always work as a deterrent.

The rule of 'treat others as you would like to be treated' is a useful guide in minor matters - it's based on knowledge of human nature and on the human need to be treated well and live in harmony with others. However, to justify punishment for serious and complex criminal acts, more robust principles are required.

Before making decisions on punishment, Humanists would regard it as their responsibility to consider the surrounding circumstances of the offence, especially if these could alter the view of what punishment is appropriate, particularly if there were social or economic circumstances that influenced the individual's behaviour like long-term unemployment, drug addiction or pressure from peers, and the many other influences that affect a person's decision to undertake criminal behaviour.

To deal satisfactorily with the issue of crime and punishment, and the multiple tasks of appeasing victims, deterring crime and acting justly towards offenders, the Humanist view would include comprehensive and thorough investigations as part of the judicial process. If punishment was found to be the most appropriate response, they would favour a scheme with an educative and rehabilitative element. But most significantly, Humanists would stress that for government and societies to reduce crime, more serious investigations are needed into its causes, especially poverty and social exclusion with the optimum and most effective deterrent being a more equitable life for everyone.

## Capital punishment: Is it morally justifiable?

In 1989, the world umbrella group for Humanists (the International and Ethical Union, IHEU) stated its opposition to any form of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment. It called for the abolition of capital punishment (the death penalty) across the world on the grounds that Humanists uphold the right to life as recognised by Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and they consider the death sentence to be a violation of that right. This then is the underlying principle behind the general Humanist objection to all premeditated killing.

Humanists oppose capital punishment on the grounds that premeditated killing is inhumane, especially as a punishment. Governments do sanction killing in wars and for self-defence, but Humanists believe that when there is time to consider a response, every endeavour should be made to limit or minimise the killing of people and to produce an alternative solution. This view obtains in judicial killing, when the decision is taken by a judge. But, this view is also held partly because errors can and do occur in court trials; when such judgements are made and the death sentence is carried out, the verdict and its result cannot be altered.

Capital punishment does not seem to deter people from committing murder. For example, the USA, which is one of the few democracies that retains capital punishment, has one of the highest murder rates in the world. So far, there has been no conclusive evidence that capital punishment as a deterrent works in general, even though it might work in some individual cases.

The overall Humanist stance on crime and punishment is that the best methods of dealing with convicted offenders at all levels of crime are: to treat them justly; to allow everyone accused of a crime a fair trial; to be treated humanely while in custody; and to ensure that the punishment fits the crime.

## Section 2: Gender

### **Is the stereotyping of male and female roles morally justifiable?**

The stereotyping of men and women, what they should look like, dress like, how they should behave and so on, can lead to discrimination or even exploitation. As with most stereotypical notions, these gender stereotypes have little or no empirical support. Although some gendered practices have become habitual, there may be little or no moral justification for them - neither men nor women should have to conform to unfounded ideas about their roles.

Preference for boys: Stereotypes about the roles of each gender have led to practices in some cultures of actively preferring and promoting one sex over the other, usually boys over girls. The Chinese government has implemented a 'one-child each couple' policy where boys are considered as the more important sex, the one that can work and does not require a dowry. At the same time, female children have reportedly been aborted, abandoned, neglected or even killed.

A further crime against females is the practice of female circumcision which in some barbaric traditions is still common. The mutilation of a girl's sexual organs is excruciatingly painful and it can be life-threatening. The procedure is often carried out on young baby girls at a time when they are unaware of the implications and unable to refuse consent. These crimes are possible because all over the world, people are accustomed to thinking of women as second to men, less worthy and somehow inferior. Humanists believe such stereotypical thinking can never be justified. Also, practices such as dowry expectation and imposed marriages undervalue human dignity and personal worth, as well as categorising people (usually women) as possessions.

Homosexuality: There are many reasons for homosexuality, including aspects of biology and personal choices, but it's always a natural phenomenon. Nevertheless, ignorance about this biological drive means that homosexuals of both genders are routinely

stereotyped, often vilified and treated as less than human. Sexual preferences should be a personal and private matter and not discriminated against because of erroneous and stereotypical ideas.

Moving with the times: Within the last ten years or so, there has been a move towards a new form of gender representation which has put more traditional gender roles in a bit of a flux. Both men and women are beginning to take on roles traditionally associated with each other, for example young men taking on a more active role in caring for their children. If, as a society, we are to accommodate these changes, we will need a set of ethics that is evolving and keeps abreast of the times and our ever-increasing knowledge about ourselves and what makes us tick - and leaves the stereotypes in the past.

Gender, like eye colour or height is not an aspect of life that can be chosen and stereotyping men or women into discrete categories because of gender bias is discriminatory, something that should not be tolerated.

### **Will economic equality between the sexes lead to a more just society?**

In the 21st century, it is surprising that economic equality between men and women should need to be discussed at all. However, although immediate economic equality on its own would still not bring about a more just society, righting this basic wrong would signal a significant move in the right direction.

Old-fashioned ideas about the role of men and women have always meant different salaries for men and women who do the same jobs. These differences are often based on ideals about women working in the home, providing for men, while men earn the money for the family. Nowadays, this way of thinking is dying out, helped by the Equal Pay legislation as well as more generally progressive attitudes. Humanism advocates freedom of choice for both men and women. If men want to stay home and care for their children they should be able to do so without recriminations. If women prefer to pursue a professional career, they too should be able to choose this option with no economic disadvantages to either party.

### Section 3: International issues

#### **Globalisation: Is the process of globalisation morally justifiable?**

The view put forward here outlines some of the issues and Humanist views pertaining to the globalisation phenomenon and weighs up these aspects in light of their moral justification.

To a varying extent, a type of international, cross-border trading has always been a feature of human activities, and it is usually mutually beneficial. The present practice of 'globalisation' only got properly under way at the end of the 20th century, following the collapse of the Soviet block and the onset of the worldwide web.

This recent explosion in trading between countries can be seen as a purely economic process operated by large conglomerate international companies and banks as they exchange their wares on a global scale. From the view of wealthy nations, the result of this trading seems positive, providing consumers who can offer to pay for them with a range of cheap goods and services. However, it is unclear whether the large companies who benefit from this trade are accountable, if so, in what way and to whom?

Multinationals have been accused of exploiting the natural resources of poorer countries through de-forestation or the overgrazing of grasslands. And some of them have refused to pay to clean up any pollution caused by their extraction of resources. Human resources can also be exploited when large companies create factories in countries where the labour market is willing to work for low pay (and sometimes in atrocious conditions). Thus, the shareholders in developed countries benefit, while their practices can have long-term and serious consequences for the social, cultural and physical conditions within the poorer host countries.

Some large companies have made efforts to put back something into the communities and do hold themselves accountable to working practices in occupational health and standards. Unfortunately, others try to limit costs to the smallest amount possible. Nonetheless, in countries like Uganda, Vietnam and India (where so

many UK companies have located their call centres), those who work there and indeed the governments, are grateful for the economic benefits and the general rise in the standard of living that such investment has provided. Many ordinary people are also grateful for the career opportunities the centres have afforded to them.

The global exchange of goods and services is monitored by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which manages and regulates trade. But, these rules are more about supporting the integrity of trading agreements and less about upholding moral values. Moreover, different values apply to trading and working practices within different cultures, and that makes it difficult on an international scale to achieve morally sound and uniform trading rules. Some governments and major economic enterprises do recognise that it's just no longer practical or ethical to treat parts of the developing world as possessions. However, in everyday practice, international trade, financial transactions and borrowing, somehow manage to manoeuvre the developing world into a pattern of growth that leaves it forever dependent.

If profits from global trade are returned to the wealthier nations while little is given back to the host country, this is a corrupt and unethical practice. But, if those who profit from international trade take positive measures to help the development and progression of the poorer developing nations for example, through job creation schemes and fair wages, this is where globalisation could be mutually beneficial and thus morally justifiable.

### **International aid: Is international aid an appropriate moral response to world poverty?**

Humanists are certain that international aid is needed in response to world poverty because poverty has many causes and those afflicted by it are sometimes unable to help themselves.

Internal wars can tear a country's resources and its infrastructure apart; issues of corruption and inefficiency and the squandering of funds meant for worthwhile causes can contribute to making poor countries even poorer. Democratic countries usually have in place basic human rights legislation where citizens can vote out poorly performing or corrupt governments and campaign for changes that give them better protection. But, there have been many instances in countries managed by a dictatorship where there has been a blatant disregard for human rights, and the leaders have used the country's resources for personal gain and left the wider population to fend for themselves and in need of food and other basic necessities.

Another cause of poverty is natural disasters; (droughts, floods, eruption of volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis) devastate land and homes, and can inflict poverty. When these happen in some of the world's poorest areas and the people who live there have no choice but to stay where they are, assistance is required quickly. This is when international emergency aid comes into play - but, it can only be effective in the short term. The most effective international aid is that which has long-term and wide-ranging benefits, where support from other countries must be steady and constant. Ideally, developing nations will become self-sufficient, but this is not easy when natural factors can so severely affect daily survival.

One of the major contributors to poverty and lack of progress is population growth. Countries like Africa and India are already dealing with increasing populations, which will grow even further over the coming years. All these people will naturally aspire to a higher level and quality of goods and services, which is likely to increase the demands on the planet's resources.

Taking steps to reduce population sizes could be one of the most basic and yet effective ways of reducing poverty. Otherwise, unless agreement can be reached on family planning and birth control programmes, serious damage might be done to the prospects of human survival, with the planet being ravaged for its remaining resources. Thoraya Obaid, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, made this statement regarding progress in Egypt in 2004:

*Today we know that if family planning, education and other health services are available, individuals will do what is best for themselves and their families. This, in turn, is leading to population stabilization in the long run; and it is reducing poverty within households and within nations.*

*In Cairo, the ability of women to control their own fertility and make decisions free of discrimination, violence and coercion were proclaimed as cornerstones of population and development policies. Today, reproductive rights are considered central to women's empowerment and advancement.*

There are many such advance planning measures that can be taken to reduce population numbers and at the same time improve the situation for the existing population. However, many cultures object to family planning or contraceptive measures on religious grounds. And religious teaching of abstinence from sexual activity is often preferred, but Humanists see this as ineffective and against the natural inclinations of young people. Instead they would advocate education programmes for both women and men in methods of birth control and teaching about responsibility in personal relationships.

In 2005, a conference between eight of the richest countries in the world (the G8) was held in Scotland to deal with the issues of international trade and poverty. At the end of the conference, the UK government and others made significant pledges as to how their countries would help to reduce poverty in Africa. Unfortunately, little progress appears to have been made since these statements of intent.

## Section 4: Medical ethics

### **Genetic engineering: Can any form of human genetic engineering be morally justified?**

A short Humanist response to the title question might be - yes, but only if proper scientific testing is also done; all the benefits for and costs to humans are carefully considered, and it can be demonstrated that the advantages outweigh any disadvantages.

Genetic engineering and genetic modification (GM) are terms used to explain the manipulation of genes with specific purposes in mind. One use of GM involves the modification of crops in order to produce new characteristics, for example by making a plant resistant to particular chemicals or insects that might otherwise kill it, or growing high yielding crops that help to feed the world's poor, such as rice with added vitamins. The process of producing GM foods appears relatively easy but the morality surrounding the process will continue to cause controversy. One basis for this concern may be the perception that the ones who will benefit most from this advance in technology may be multinational corporations.

Genetic engineering is beginning to be used to create animals with human-compatible organs for transplantation because this method is faster and more specific than traditional selective breeding. Some of this genetic manipulation combines genes from different species, and would be impossible any other way. The concerns that arise from such research focus on what the effects will be on the environment, natural selection and human health.

The cloning of human beings is another moral issue of genetic engineering and it is one that is strongly debated. Those who agree with cloning argue that it is quite natural, like the process bacteria use to reproduce in order to make identical copies of themselves, or a plant grown from a small cutting of another plant. According to this view, cloning is just another reproductive option, and those who wish to research cloning (or indeed to be cloned) should not be stopped. Some argue that cloning is morally acceptable but not practical while others say that it's immoral under any circumstances.

Research in the area of biotechnology is still in its infancy, and it is, as yet, unclear whether it brings major benefits and/or considerable costs to society. However, it's also an area where there is much public concern about the possible consequences of such research. The debate is complicated because the general public's understanding of the scientific facts behind GM is generally limited.

Humanists are interested in the facts and in incorporating the most reliable and up-to-date scientific position in their outlook. Some general information we have so far is thus: By experimenting with genes, experts may find cures for diseases such as cancers and cystic fibrosis, that would help sufferers develop weaker reactions or immunities to certain conditions. Some diseases are caused by gene mutations that result in a protein not being made at all or in the production of an abnormal protein. As discoveries are continually being made about which human genes are responsible for which characteristics, it may be possible to intercept such mutations. In the future, more diseases and disabilities will become detectable or predictable a lot earlier, sometimes even before birth. Many gene-related diseases are very complex, involving many different genes and environmental factors, and may or may not be treatable, raising new issues in medical ethics.

Scientific discoveries increase our knowledge of the world, but they contain no indications of what we are to do with that knowledge, it is not the job of science to answer moral questions. It is therefore up to all those concerned to decide the How, What, When, Who and Why to apply scientific knowledge.

Humanists want to see improvements in the quality of human lives but since no one can predict with certainty whether aspects of genetic science will achieve this, continued open and well-informed debate based on good evidence and not on myths or irrational fears is essential. In the light of global food shortages and escalating prices it is essential we weigh up all the facts. Obtaining and understanding the facts, assessing the risks realistically, and balancing the potential benefits against the potential harm in each case would be the guiding principles of a Humanist decision made on genetic modification of foods or genes.

## **Can any forms of Euthanasia be morally justified?**

Humanists respect for life and their support for the autonomy of the individual in the matter of personal healthcare means that in most circumstances, they would uphold Euthanasia and consider it morally justifiable if and when the person concerned has decided that they have lived long enough.

Humanists believe that when the capacities that made life worth living have gone, and in order to avoid the extreme pain that sometimes accompanies the prolonged process of dying, the freedom to have personal input into the 'when and how' of the dying process allows the patient to retain personal autonomy and dignity.

The arguments on both sides of this issue are partly fuelled by the many different words and phrases that have developed to explain it. Some of these words and phrases are emotive, such as: Involuntary Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide or Mercy Killing. In general, Humanists prefer to use a more neutral 'Assisted Dying' description. Whether Assisted Dying is morally justified can be found by considering the costs and benefits to all the people concerned.

In some cases, sufferers make it clear that they wish to die and request help because they are unable or unwilling to do so themselves. Sometimes when patients are in a coma or where there is senile dementia or the patient is an infant, the decision to help that person to die needs to be made by someone else.

Although strictly speaking, it is illegal in the UK, it's generally accepted that many doctors already help patients to die. This can happen in different ways. 1) By withholding treatment (including nourishment) that would keep them alive. 2) Providing pain relief like morphine that has the side-effect of hastening death. Whether no action is taken to preserve a patient's life or action is taken to cause death, the final effect is the same.

There may or may not be a slight moral distinction between allowing someone to die and actively assisting them to die. And, it may be less of a moral burden for doctors to withdraw or withhold treatment and let nature take its course than to administer a lethal

drug. It's all a matter of how we choose to interpret the actions - taking no action to preserve life could equally be interpreted as taking action to hasten death. Deliberately bringing about someone's death in order to end their suffering could be interpreted as merciful because it's often less painful and less emotionally traumatic for the patient (and those who love them and witness their agony) than enduring the long and painful route that death can sometimes take.

Arguments about Assisted Dying often hinge on human rights, either to life or to death. But, the Scottish and UK governments have yet to settle the question of what should be done when seriously ill people prefer to end their lives and whether they have a right in law to make this choice?

Sufferers sometimes wish to end their lives but lack the physical strength or the means to do so. In these cases, doctors (who have no objections) could help. But, as the law stands, if patients make the decision to die, in order to get medical help to do so, they must gather together the finance, at least one companion, enough courage and the physical strength to travel abroad.

Humanists consider helping patients to end their lives with dignity and pain-free to be a merciful act. If a patient is constantly suffering, with no quality of life and expresses a wish for it to end, it would seem only cruel to prolong that suffering for the sake of someone else's beliefs, especially when the patient does not agree with these beliefs. Prolonging life where there is no apparent benefit appears neither compassionate nor moral.

The whole issue of Assisted Dying has become about due to the ability of medical and scientific advancements to sustain life. Even without a cure, doctors can keep patients alive much longer than would have been possible 20 years ago. But, the codes of conduct that medical practitioners must adhere to were formulated well before then, sometimes even centuries ago, and they are not designed to take account of 21st century advances and 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking.

In contrast, countries like Switzerland and the Netherlands have adapted to modern advancements with various schemes to assist

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patients to end their lives which have been legal for about 20 years. In Oregon in the USA, doctors can prescribe lethal drugs to patients who are terminally ill and judged to be in their last six months of life. There is also an active movement called Death with Dignity campaigning in the USA to change the relevant laws in various states.

Some people prepare a 'living will' to ensure their last wishes are taken into account. It means that medical staff and family members are aware of what the patient wants, if (s)he can no longer express them. But, Living Wills are not yet legal and there is no compulsion on health authorities to accept them and no moral obligation on families to respect them.

So in general terms, Humanism supports most forms of Assisted Dying, while it also upholds the need for stringent safeguards including: Adequate counselling for all persons involved; no reasonable hope of recovery for the patient who must give clear and witnessed instructions without pressure being applied, and the involvement of at least two doctors. However, if people in possession of full information and sound judgement decide that their continued life has no value, then Humanists believe their wishes should be respected.

Humanism ignores the argument which often arises in these cases that medical intervention is somehow meddling with natural processes of life, because according to that line of thinking, even taking an aspirin for a headache does the same. This is not to say that Humanists would agree that all medical intervention at all times is necessarily the correct action to take, but assisting someone to die can be morally justified as long as it is always subject to strict rules and the decision is taken in the interests of seeking the most humane outcome for all concerned.

## Section 5: War and peace

### Responses to war: Is war ever morally justifiable?

Some people say that the human race will always have wars between them because it's part of their nature to protect their territory and tribes by whatever means they can. But, Humanists feel that intelligence and ability to reason can overcome humanity's more primal instincts and that peaceful solutions should always be sought first. Peaceful solutions are not always easy to find or to enforce but that should not be a barrier to seeking them. On the other hand, it can sometimes be justified for an individual to resort to violence in self-defence, or to protect the lives of others, and the same self-defence or protection argument could justify war on a national level.

It can be argued that if it's always wrong to intentionally kill, then all wars that do so must be morally wrong. Modern sophisticated weaponry can destroy whole towns, killing all the inhabitants in a short space of time. Killing only the 'guilty' in these cases would be impossible, so in any modern conflict where these weapons are used, it has to be accepted that innocent lives will be lost. But, that's a wholly different proposition from deliberately targeting civilian populations, especially when technology has the capacity to pinpoint targets with such accuracy to ensure minimal loss of life.

It may never be possible to wholly justify war in a moral sense. Consequently, responsible and politically concerned individuals should do all they can to ensure that governments consider all options and all alternative methods of resolving national conflicts before war is decided. One way to make war less likely is to encourage more countries across the world to embrace democracy and Human Rights, because liberal democracies have a better track record of not engaging in war-provoking behaviour.

In these efforts, every Humanist organisation would strongly support the work of the United Nations, an organisation aimed at resolving conflicts between nations as peacefully as possible and one that Humanists had some part in setting up. When the United Nations was established in 1945, the participating countries agreed

on a Charter, which is regularly updated. The Preamble to the Charter (which includes its purpose) can be read in Appendix 2.

We give the last word on this subject to those who are most affected by wars - members of the armed forces. Most soldiers, sailors or aircrew have little say in whether they go to war or not: it is part of their job; it is what they sign up for when they join their nations' forces and defending their country might include sacrificing their own lives in that process (whether or not they agree with the principles that led to the war in the first place). The following is an extract from the UK Armed forces Humanist Association Constitution:

*"In battle, and all other operations, high morale equates to the moral strength which gives true ascendancy over the enemy. The duty of bearing arms, of being prepared to fight, kill and if necessary die in carrying out orders, carries with it the responsibility only to do so in a just cause. All service personnel have direct and unique responsibility for life and death. Individually, all service personnel are subject to international and national law, and must discharge their duties not just according to orders and law, but consciously and clearly for the greater good. Commanders must ensure that all subordinates understand these responsibilities of their service, and that their cause is just. This entails proper understanding of the Laws of War, Humanitarian Law and Rules of Engagement; but it also means an underlying deep comprehension of the moral and ethical responsibility of bearing arms. British servicemen must obey their orders confident that the ends, ways and means are right morally as well as militarily."*

### **Modern armaments: Can the use of any types of modern armaments be morally justified?**

Today, many countries, including the USA and the UK, have an array of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons at their disposal and other countries are working towards having similar weapons.

There is an argument that such weapons are required for defence to deter other countries from instigating an attack. There is also a strong economic argument for the manufacture and sale of weapons. The production of sophisticated modern weaponry needs modern technology and its manufacture provides many jobs. Moreover, there are thousands of people and government departments whose funds and savings and investments are tied up in the arms trade. If the arms trade ceased, all these people and institutions would need to find alternative ways of generating money.

Poor countries cannot afford to manufacture modern armaments and some countries with the required funds lack the technological expertise. These less advanced countries become markets for out-of-date weaponry, allowing the manufacture of more modern and more destructive weapons to continue elsewhere.

Since Humanists do not believe in an afterlife, their current lives are all the more valuable to them - and they would think carefully before supporting any war that was a threat to that life and the lives of others, especially since today's wars not only kill people, but cause massive damage to the fragile earth that sustains all life.

The use of armaments is a political issue and individual Humanists views on it might differ. But, to be able to make any decision about the manufacture, sale and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) it's necessary to consider the many questions the subject raises. For example, which countries should have them and how many? In the past, agreements have been made between world powers to reduce their stocks of WMDs, but the developing countries are now just catching up and want their own and for the same reasons, deterrence and self-defence. So, what nation is to decide and police these efforts and on what justification can it do so? These are complex and hard questions. To come to an answer, all Humanists would agree that reliable evidence must be consulted and reason applied.

# Appendix 1

## The Amsterdam Declaration

**Humanism is ethical.** It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.

**Humanism is rational.** It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends.

**Humanism supports democracy and human rights.** Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.

**Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.** Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is undogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.

**Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion.** The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognises that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.

**Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination** and recognises the transforming power of art. Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

**Humanism is a lifeway aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living** and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

We have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour. *International Humanist and Ethical Union, (2002).*

# Appendix 2

## United National Charter Preamble

### **We the peoples of the United Nations, determine**

- To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind,
- To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,
- To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained,
- To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, -  
And for these ends
- To practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours,
- To unite our strength to maintain international peace and security,
- To ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest,
- To employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

# Useful Resources

## HUMANIST ORGANISATIONS

The Humanist Academy in Scotland

[www.humanist-academy.co.uk](http://www.humanist-academy.co.uk)

Edinburgh Students Humanist Group

[www.humanist.eusa.ed.ac.uk](http://www.humanist.eusa.ed.ac.uk)

British Humanist Association

[www.humanismforschools.org.uk](http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk) (refers to England)

International Humanist and Ethical Union

[www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org)

Center for Inquiry Transnational

[www.centerforinquiry.net](http://www.centerforinquiry.net)

## RELATED ORGANISATIONS

National Secular Society

[www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

The Brights

[www.the-brights.net](http://www.the-brights.net)

Richard Dawkins Foundation

<http://richarddawkins.net>

## PODCASTS

Point of Inquiry

[www.pointofinquiry.org](http://www.pointofinquiry.org)

Institute of Humanist Studies

[www.humaniststudies.org/podcast](http://www.humaniststudies.org/podcast)