



Margaret Knight

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She stunned a lot of people by broadcasting two radio shows that argued for moral education to be taught separately to religious education. While these ideas were strange at the time, they are now considered to be normal in education.



She believed that children should learn about how to work out what was right and wrong through different subjects. For example, she thought that children should question historical events and think about what had happened. She also believed that we should question and think about different people's views in order to come to a decision about whether actions were right or wrong.

She was a known humanist and promoted the idea of rational thought (thinking and acting based on facts and not just feelings).



Jim Al-Khalili



Jim was born in Iraq in 1962. His father was Iraqi and his mother was English. They decided to move to Britain in 1979, when he was 17 years old.

Al-Khalili is a scientist and president of the British Humanist Society.

He thinks that being good is an important part of being a human being. All people should aim to make the world a better place and be good because it is the right thing to do.

He says that we should use evidence from reality to understand the world around us and should seek to explain how the world works using science.

Compassion and empathy should be taught and encouraged in all people as these are positive human qualities. This would enable us to understand ourselves and other people better.



Alice Roberts

Born in England in 1973, Alice Roberts is a scientist who focuses on studying diseases in ancient human remains.

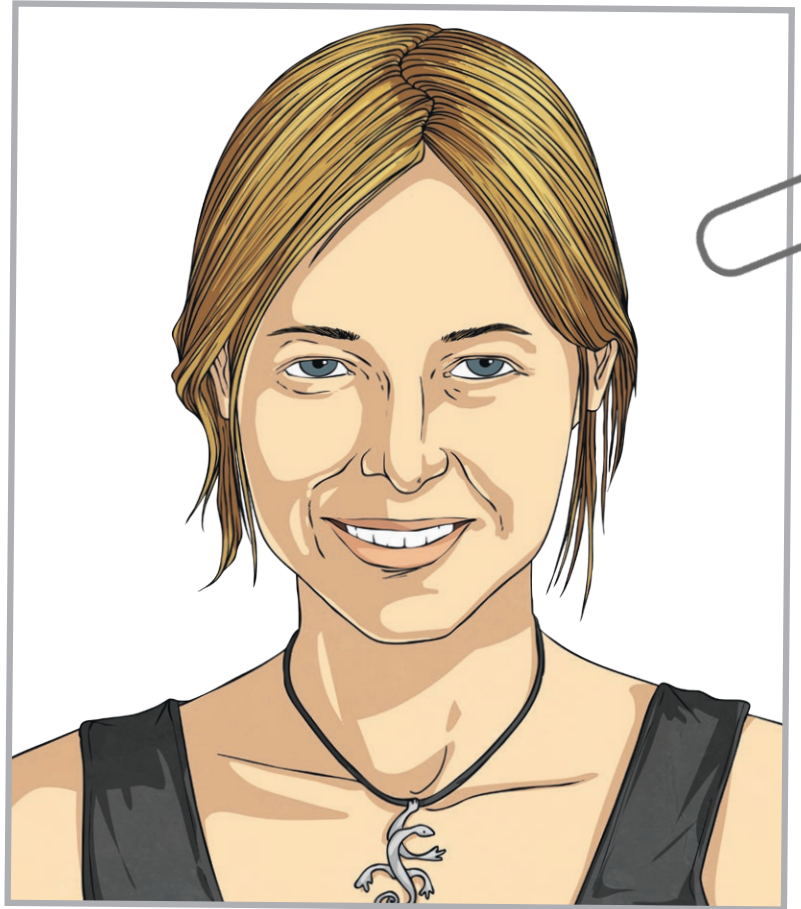
She presents programmes on television and writes books about human beings, how they evolved and the journeys the earliest humans took to reach the different parts of the world.

She argues that science education is really important in schools and that scientists should make sure that all people understand scientific ideas.

Roberts states that:

“Science is the best tool we have for understanding the world around us and that is both wonderful and enriching in itself”.

Roberts believes that focusing on being rational in our thinking will help people to find positive ways of living life.



Jawaharlal Nehru

Nehru, born in 1889, was the first Prime Minister in India after it gained independence from Britain in 1945.

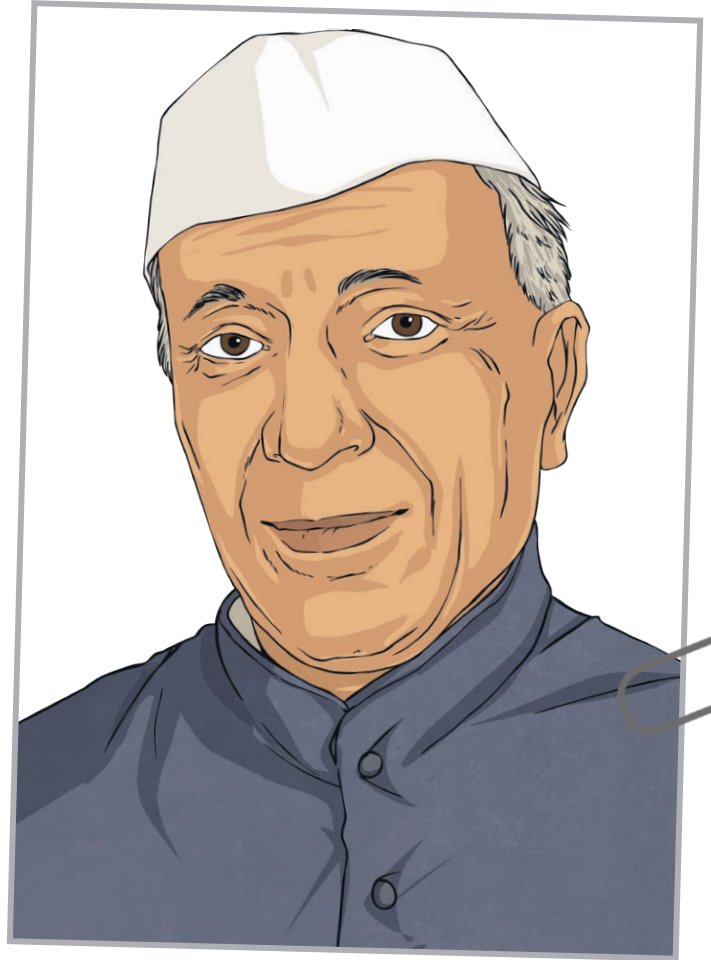
He did not believe in the religion he was brought up with, Hinduism, arguing that there was no heaven or reincarnation. Instead, he argued that all people needed to focus on living life positively for themselves and their fellow human beings.

Being born into a wealthy family, he was educated in England and went to Cambridge University. He realised that few Indians would have a similar education and saw this as an important way in which people could improve their lives.

He believed that all countries should be independent and democratic. During his early life, India was a British colony (a country that was ruled by Britain). He argued that it should be independent and that all Indians should be able to vote and decide what would happen in their own country.

His campaign for Indian independence was based on the idea that all beliefs would be respected, including those with no religion. He believed that different groups of people could live together peacefully.

Nehru wanted people to think rationally, be independent and take responsibility for themselves. He believed this would enable all humans to live better lives.





Richard Dawkins

Dawkins is a scientist who has furthered the work of Charles Darwin on evolution.

He believes that we should use the scientific method to find out facts and the truth about the world.

“Isn't it a noble, an enlightened way of spending our brief time in the sun, to work at understanding the universe...?” - Dawkins

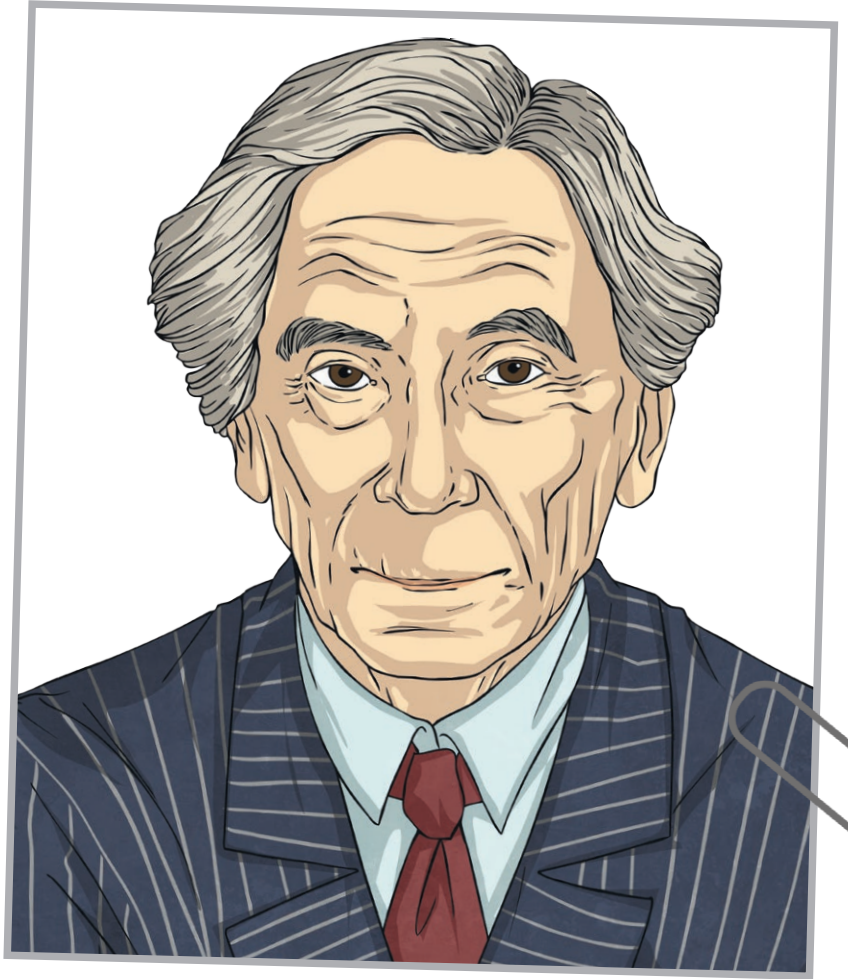
The scientific method is a way of observing, measuring and conducting experiments. It involves coming up with a hypothesis that is tested and, if needed, changed according to the evidence from the experiment.

This way of asking questions and testing them means that we can know if ideas are true.

He argues against superstition (a belief that supernatural forces control and explain actions and events). For example, in the past, many believed that illnesses were a punishment, whereas now we know that illnesses are caused by things like germs or bacteria.



Bertrand Russell



Russell was born in Wales in 1872. His godfather was John Stuart Mill.

One of the ideas that he strongly promoted was that beliefs should be based on evidence and logic (a way of thinking that checks that the ideas are reasonable and based on good judgement).

From about the age of fifteen he asked questions about the existence of God, for which he could find no evidence. At the age of eighteen he became an atheist.

He once said:

“I should say the universe is just there, and that’s all.”

This showed that he did not believe that God created the universe.

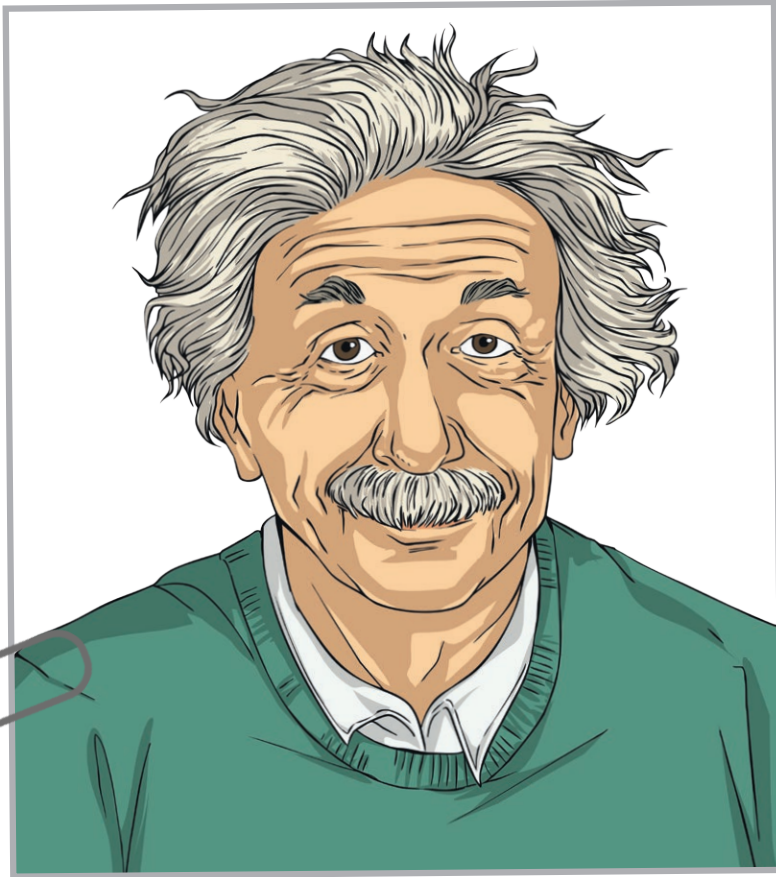
He thought about human emotions like love, believed in the search for knowledge and truth, and wanted to help find solutions for “the sufferings of mankind.”

When nuclear weapons were developed, he became one of the earliest supporters of CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). When he was a frail, white-haired old man of eighty-nine, he led a mass sit-in in Trafalgar Square for which he received a prison sentence.

Throughout his life he grappled with his own beliefs and the problems of the universe and humanity. He never wavered from his passionate belief that people should practise kind feelings towards each other if the human race is to achieve happiness. He put his beliefs into practice in his work for peace and disarmament.



Albert Einstein



Albert Einstein was one of the most important people in the 20th century. He was a German scientist who had to move to the United States of America (USA) in the 1930s during the Second World War, as the Nazi Party came into power in Germany. He helped many Jewish people leave Germany as the government discriminated against them.

This experience and his humanist beliefs meant that Einstein had a long record of opposing racism in the USA. He worked with different groups of people to help them put forward

laws that would stop discrimination against Black Americans.

He believed that behaving ethically (distinguishing between right and wrong behaviour and actions) was not linked to religion. Instead, he believed that it was the result of sympathising and building strong relationships with others.

Einstein argued that education was really important. He said that people should pursue knowledge and try to work out what is true. This would help all human beings live their lives in a positive way.



Sam Harris

Sam Harris is an American neuroscientist, born in 1967.

He explains humanism as a way of thinking about how to live life. He argues that by understanding our strengths and weaknesses we can live a good life.

Further, he argues that we have to respect other people and make sure that we don't harm people on purpose. In this way we can live with other human beings in a peaceful way.



Making good decisions involves thinking about the consequences of our actions and not just acting because we feel a certain way. This is true of positive and negative feelings.

He thinks that all children should be taught to take responsibility for the choices they make, think clearly, question and ask for evidence to support the ideas they are being taught. This will help them become rational adults who can make good decisions for themselves. Therefore, education is important both in terms of the knowledge we learn but also how we learn to access it as we grow older.

Ideas can be good or bad and the only way to work out the difference, according to Harris, is to look at the real world and the evidence we have for the effect of these ideas. If ideas have negative effects, then we should modify or change them. Hanging on to bad ideas only leads to human suffering, which he thinks we should tackle by sharing good ideas with all people.



Humanist Thinkers - Answers

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Nehru, born in 1889, was the first Prime Minister in India after it gained independence from Britain in 1945.

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