

# Theme B: Religion and Life

What could I be asked about in the exam?

- ✓ You must be able to explain contrasting beliefs on the following three issues with reference to different Christian ideas:

- Abortion.
- Euthanasia
- Animal experimentation

## THE ORIGIN AND VALUE OF THE UNIVERSE

- ✓ The origins of the universe, including:

- religious teachings about the origins of the universe, and different interpretations of these
- the relationship between scientific views, such as the Big Bang theory, and religious views.

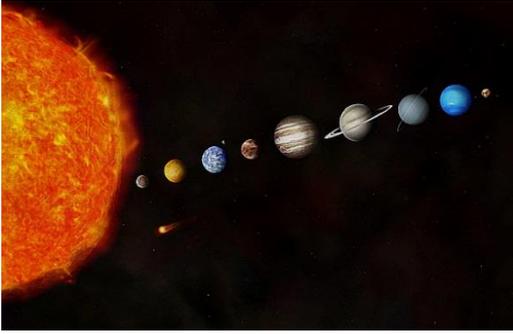
- ✓ The value of the world and the duty of human beings to protect it, including religious teaching about stewardship, dominion, responsibility, awe and wonder.
- ✓ The use and abuse of the environment, including the use of natural resources, pollution.
- ✓ The use and abuse of animals, including:

- animal experimentation
- the use of animals for food.

## THE ORIGIN AND VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

- ✓ religious teachings about the origins of human life, and different interpretations of these
- ✓ the relationship between scientific views, such as evolution, and religious views.
- ✓ The concepts of sanctity of life and the quality of life.
- ✓ Abortion, including situations when the mother's life is at risk.
- ✓ Ethical arguments related to abortion, including those based on the sanctity of life and quality of life.
- ✓ Euthanasia.
- ✓ Beliefs about death and an afterlife, and their impact on beliefs about the value of human life

# The origin and value of the universe



## Origin of the universe - the scientific view

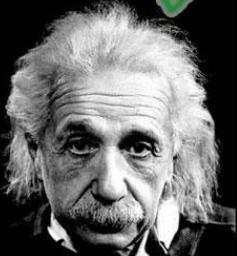
Science tells us that the universe began 13.7 billion years ago from a point of singularity (an infinitely hot, infinitely dense point in space no bigger than a pinhead). The pressure at this point was so great, that it could not be contained and began to expand from this point. As the expansion cooled, the first elements hydrogen and helium began to form. Over lots of time, all matter formed, including planets and stars. Everything in the universe is continuing to expand from the point of singularity and this expansion can be observed today. The existence of the universe appears to be a 'cosmic accident'.

## Origin of the universe - the Christian view

Christians find the creation story in *Genesis*, the first book of the Bible. This tells readers that God made the universe just over 6000 years ago, creating different parts of the universe on different days. God lovingly crafted the universe for his creatures out of nothing. This is very different to the scientific view of the origin of the universe. A very small minority of Christians believe that the *Genesis* story of creation is **literal truth** and tells us the true scientific story of how God created the universe. These Christians are called **creationists/Biblical literalists**.



“Science without religion is lame  
Religion without science is blind.”



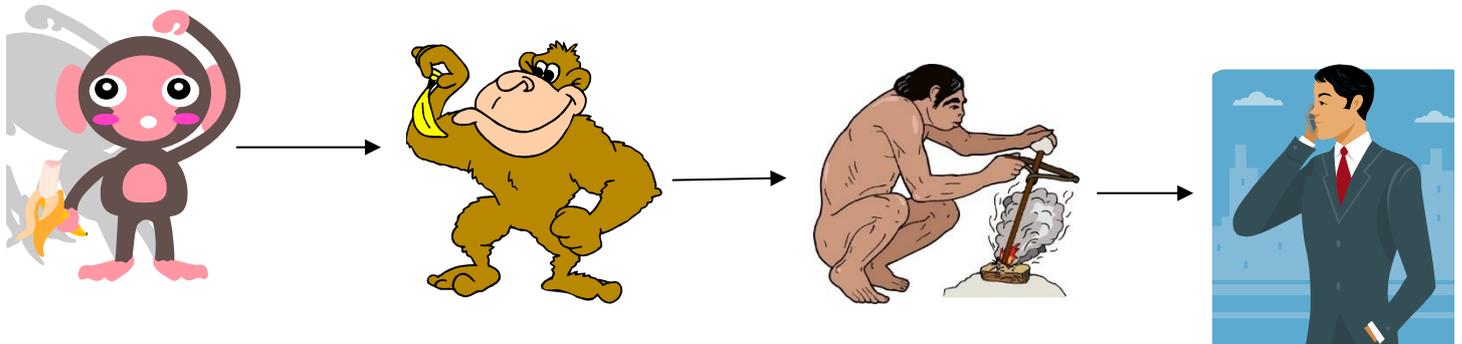
Most Christians, including Roman Catholic and Church of England Christians believe that science tells us *how* the universe was made and religion tells us *why* the universe was made. They feel that Christianity and science can go together to give us a fuller understanding of the universe. It makes sense, they argue, that God created the universe through the scientific process of the Big Bang. There must be something behind the universe as common sense tells us that nothing can come from nothing.

## Christian interpretations of the Genesis story of creation

<u>Creationists and Biblical Literalists</u>	<u>Liberal Christians (Roman Catholics etc.)</u>
The Creation story in the Bible is scientific fact and should be interpreted <b>literally</b> . The 'evidence' for the Big Bang is false and is a trick of Satan to turn people away from God. God made the universe out of nothing in 6 days and rested on the seventh.	Genesis should be interpreted <b>symbolically</b> . The Bible tells us <u>why</u> the universe exists - God loves us and wanted to make a universe in which we could live and form a relationship with him. Science tells us <u>how</u> the world was created. God guided the process of the Big Bang.

# The origin and value of human life

## Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution



In his book "On the Origin of the Species" (1859), Darwin argued that species change over time due to a process of **Natural Selection**. This means that species which are best suited to a particular environment will survive and pass their genes on to future generations. Over millions of years, Natural Selection produces, not only variations in species, but entirely new species as well.

Darwin's idea of Evolution is accepted by scientists as true and there is evidence of changes in species to be found in fossils. Evolution can be used to explain how intelligent life emerged on earth. The animals with the characteristics best suited to survival lived and passed on their genes to the next generation. Those who were not 'just right' died and their genes died with them.

Many scientists believe that evolutionary theory shows that life on earth is a chance event which needs no further explanation. However, there are scientists who feel that God must have created intelligent life through the complex process of evolution and Natural Selection.

## Christian views on the origin of life



The Bible states that God created fish and birds on the fifth day and land animals and humans on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation. Humans were created last by God as the pinnacle (best) of his creation. Genesis 1:27 states that God made humans "in his image" meaning that there is a link between God and humans and that humans have a special relationship with God. As God's special creation, humans have **dominion** (kingship) over the other creatures. However, God has also given them the responsibility of **stewardship** which means that they must look after the world and all of God's creatures.

### Creationist Christians and Biblical Literalists:

The Bible provides the scientific understanding of the origin of life. Evidence for evolution such as fossils are tricks of Satan to turn us away from God. Evolutionary theory is wrong and must be rejected in favour of the Genesis account of the origin of life.

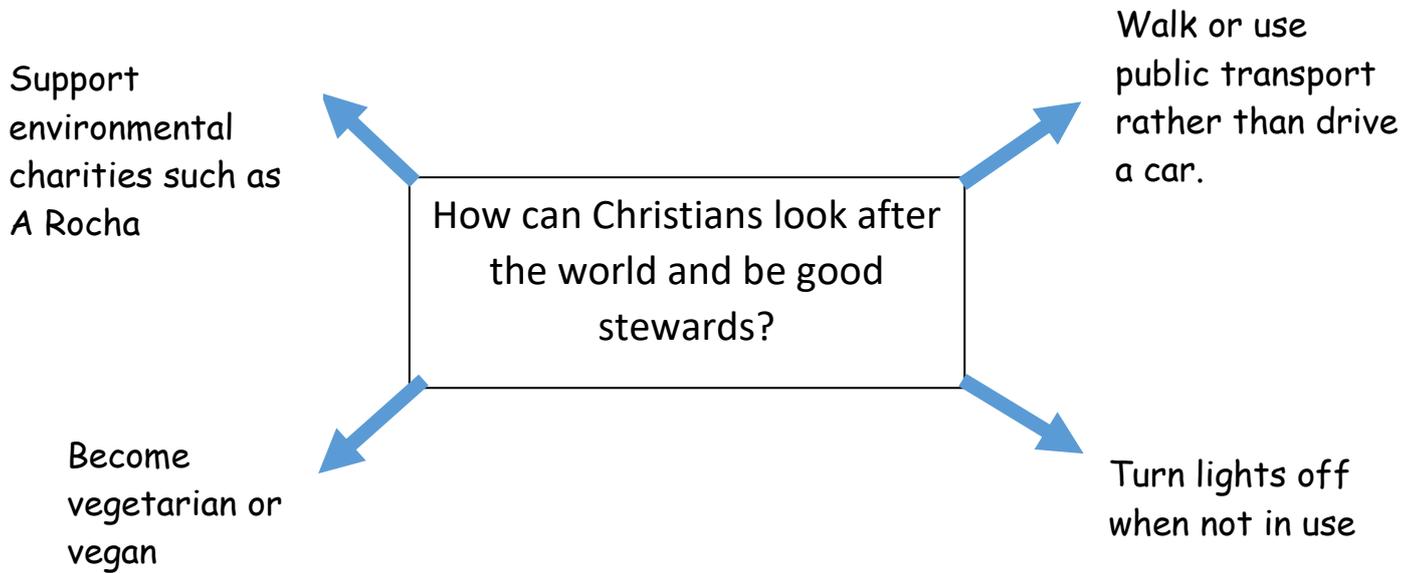
### Liberal Christians, including Roman Catholic and Church of England Christians:

The Biblical account of the origin of life is symbolic. God did create life and has a special relationship with humans, but he created life by guiding the process of evolution and Natural Selection.

#### Key terms:

**Dominion:** Kingship. God gave humans power to rule over the other animals on earth. He created them last as his special creation and so they have authority over the earth.

**Stewardship:** God gave humans the responsibility to look after the earth and all of its creatures. In the Parable of the Faithful Servant, Jesus tells us that those who look after the world will be rewarded in Heaven, but those who do not look after the world will be sent to Hell.



Why do Christians look after the environment?

- God gave humans dominion over the world but also the responsibility to look after it (stewardship). In the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful servant, Jesus tells them that those who look after the world will be rewarded in heaven, those who don't will be punished.
- Jesus taught Christians to treat other people as they would like to be treated. Christians therefore feel that they have a moral responsibility to look after the environment so that it is nice for future generations.

Should Christians be vegetarian?

<u>Yes, they should</u>	<u>No, they shouldn't</u>
Christians have a responsibility to look after God's creatures - this is stewardship. Killing animals for food is cruel and unnecessary.	St Paul taught that those who only eat vegetables are 'weak.' Humans need meat in order to be healthy and strong.
Jesus taught us "blessed are the merciful, as they shall receive mercy" - if we show mercy by not killing animals, God will show us mercy by allowing us into heaven.	God gave Adam and Eve dominion over all animals and told them that "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." (Genesis 9:3)
The key message of Jesus is love and treating others with respect. This love and respect should spread to animals as well as humans.	St Paul said "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience." (1 Corinthians 10: 25)

## Do Christians believe that it is acceptable to test on animals?

### **Yes, they do**

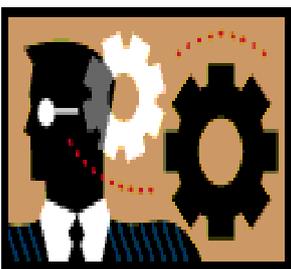
- Most Christians, including Roman Catholic Christians, feel that it is acceptable to test on animals if the testing is for a medicine that will help humans. This is because humans are 'made in God's image' and so are the most important of all God's creatures.
- God put humans in charge of all of the other animals (dominion) and so they have a right to use animals in whatever way they wish. It is much better, some Christians argue, to test a product on an animal than risk hurting a human being.

### **No, they don't**

- Quaker Christians take their stewardship very seriously and try to protect animals. Many are vegetarian and most are completely against animal testing (although some accept it for medicine that will potentially save human lives)
- Some Christians argue that Jesus' command to treat others as they would like to be treated also extends to animals and so they should never be hurt.

Atheists and humanists may argue that common sense dictates the use of animal testing for medicines that can save human lives. However, they may be against the use of testing for cosmetics. Both atheists and religious believers sometimes choose to become vegetarian/vegan as they feel that they have a duty to look after the animals of the earth.

## The Sanctity of Life



All religions teach the importance of the **sanctity of life**. For religious believers, all life is sacred, be that human life, or the life of other living creatures on earth. Believers feel that life is a special gift which is priceless. Human life is even more precious as God created humans "in his image" (**Gen 1:27**). Humans are the pinnacle of God's creative activity and only he should decide when life begins or ends. One of the Ten Commandments states "**Thou shalt not kill.**" (**Exodus 20:13**)

Christians believe that God is interested and involved in every human's life. It doesn't matter whether that person is a Christian, or if they are a good or bad person, God is taking an active role in their lives. Christians feel that life is a special gift from God and so it should be valued and nurtured. As God created all life, only God has the right to take it away, and thus it is forbidden for anyone to take the life of another person. Christians also believe that Jesus showed that all life should be valued in his

life and teachings. Jesus spent time with people, such as tax collectors, who others treated as outcasts, showing that all people are of worth in the eyes of God.

### What about the Quality of Life?

Some people believe that it is not how long someone lives which is important, but the quality of their life when they are alive. Quality of life is:

- When a person feels of value and capable of contributing to life;
- The extent to which life is meaningful and pleasurable;
- Being free from undue pain, anxiety and stress.
- Feeling valued and on top of the world.

Some people believe that sometimes it is better to let someone die peacefully rather than preserving their life because it is 'sacred'. Preserving life can lead to suffering and pain in some circumstances and so some people may feel that it is a good idea to let people pass away without medical intervention. As this is not actively killing someone, it is not contrary to religious ideas on the sanctity of life. However, some religious people feel that everything possible should be done to prolong the gift of life given by God.

## Abortion – terminating a pregnancy



### Abortion and the law

The 1967 Abortion Act said that a woman may get an abortion if agreed by two doctors for the following reasons:

- The mother's life is at risk
- The mother's physical or mental health may be at risk.
- The wellbeing of an existing child may be at risk with the arrival of an additional child.
- There is a substantial risk the child may be born seriously handicapped.

The 1990 Act states abortions cannot take place after 24 weeks unless the mother's life is at risk.

Christians do not all agree on the issue of abortion. Some Christians, such as Roman Catholic Christians, feel that abortion goes against teaching on the Sanctity of Life and breaks the commandments "thou shalt not kill." They feel that sex should only occur within a marriage for the purpose of having children and so abortion should not be legally allowed. There are no circumstances in which Roman Catholics allow abortion - they have a pro-life position. However, although most other Christians feel that abortion is to be a last resort, they feel that it should be legal as there are circumstances in which it is necessary, such as if the mother's physical or mental health is at risk if the pregnancy continues.

Broadly speaking, we can summarise Christian views on abortion under two headings; **pro-life and pro-choice.**



Pro-life supporters are Christians who believe that abortion is totally unacceptable. Christians who adopt this stance are Roman Catholics, Christian Orthodox and some Evangelical Protestant Christian groups. Pro-life groups state that Christian belief in the sanctity of life means that it is totally unthinkable to abort a foetus, as it is human life and is therefore a special gift from God.

In order to discourage women from choosing an abortion, Pro-life groups offer counselling to women who are unhappy upon discovering that they are pregnant. They provide emotional and practical support in an effort to help women to cope with their situation. They offer baby clothes and equipment to those who are facing financial problems because of the arrival of an unplanned child, and also provide accommodation to those who are forced to leave their homes due to the news of their pregnancy. They also support hospices to care for terminally ill babies, in order to support families and encourage women to have their baby, no matter what its health.



Pro Choice Christians leave it to individuals to decide whether or not abortion is right for them. They feel that it is impossible to make rules that apply to all situations. To be pro-choice does not mean to be pro-abortion, as most pro-choice Christians would see abortion as a last resort.

Pro-choice campaigners argue that women must be given the right to decide whether or not to continue with a pregnancy. They feel that making abortion illegal simply

increases the number of illegal abortions which are performed in unclean conditions by unqualified 'doctors', which, not only kills the unborn baby, but is also a threat to the life of the mother. They also feel that it is unfair to take away the choice from a pregnant woman who finds out that her baby will be severely handicapped or will die at a very young age, or that her own life may be threatened by the pregnancy.

Most atheists/humanists are pro-choice. They feel that all children have the right to be born into a family that wants them and has the resources to look after them. They feel that a woman should have the right to choose when she has children and how many she has and strongly feel that the law should allow for abortions to take place. They may look back to the times when abortion was illegal and women resorted to 'backstreet abortions' which were dangerous and led to the deaths of many women through infection.

## Euthanasia



The word 'euthanasia' comes from a Greek word which means 'gentle death' or 'good death'. It is often referred to as 'mercy killing' and means bringing a peaceful end to the dying process. There are different types of euthanasia:

**Voluntary/Active Euthanasia** - Actively helping someone who has asked for help to die to avoid suffering.  
**(Assisted suicide)**

**Passive Euthanasia** - When a form of treatment which has been used to keep someone alive is withdrawn. For example, when life support technology is switched off because a person has been declared 'brain-dead'.

**Compulsory/Involuntary Euthanasia** - Ending the life of someone who has NOT asked for it. This has been done in times of ethnic cleansing such as in Nazi Germany.

**Indirect Euthanasia**  
When a person dies as a result of the treatment/ medication they are given to help them - such as pain killers. The Doctrine of Double Effect allows this.

*"There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot"*  
 (Ecclesiastes 3:2)

This quotation is used to support Christian teaching on the Sanctity of Life. It means that only God should decide when humans die and so euthanasia is wrong.

Although most Christians are against euthanasia, some forms are more acceptable than others to them. The **Doctrine of Double Effect** states that if a person dies as a result of drugs which are given for the primary purpose of stopping pain, then this is acceptable as the intention is to stop the pain and not to kill the patient. This is known as indirect euthanasia.

The Roman Catholic Christian position on euthanasia is that it is not acceptable as it goes against the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and Christian teaching on the Sanctity of Life. However, if a person dies as a result of medication given for the purpose of alleviating pain, then this is permissible under the Doctrine of Double Effect.

Some Christians do accept euthanasia in all forms as they believe that Jesus taught us to be merciful and to treat others as we would like to be treated. They feel that everyone has the right to die with dignity at a time chosen by them. Some Christians have been involved in protests to make euthanasia legal in this country.

Christians should <u>not</u> support euthanasia	Christians <u>should</u> support euthanasia
<p>"There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot" (Ecclesiastes 3:2)                      Christian teaching on the Sanctity of Life states that only God should decide when life ends</p>	<p>Jesus taught us to be merciful. We should show mercy to those who are in great pain by allowing them the right to decide when they die</p>
<p>Euthanasia goes against the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."                      Asking a doctor to kill someone through administering a lethal injection is unfair as they will have to answer to God for taking another life.</p>	<p>Jesus also taught us to treat other people as we would like to be treated. As we would want someone to end our pain and suffering if we were terminally ill, we should do the same for others.</p>
<p>Hospices do a great job in supporting people with terminal illnesses and their families. They make people comfortable and give them more time with their loved ones - euthanasia is unnecessary.</p>	<p>At the moment, people who wish to opt for euthanasia have to travel to countries where it is legal, such as Holland. This is an unnecessary burden and expense for them - it should be legal in this country so that they can choose to die with dignity near their homes and families.</p>

# Life after death



Christians believe that Jesus' death on the cross enabled God to forgive humans for the Original Sin of Adam and Eve and allow them eternal life with him in heaven after death. Most Christians believe that those who have been good in this life will be rewarded by entering heaven after death and those who have been bad will go to hell after death to be punished forever.

This means that this life is valuable as the way that we act in this life will determine where we go after death. We must look after other people, animals and the environment as good stewards so that we can be rewarded in heaven. We must also respect the sanctity of human life by discouraging abortion and euthanasia as only God has the right to decide when life begins and ends. Some Christians believe that those who have abortions, take the life of another through administering euthanasia, or choose to end their own lives through euthanasia will be punished in hell. They may also believe that an unborn child who is aborted will not get the chance to enter heaven.

However, some Christians argue that as God is forgiving and merciful, he will not punish people who opt for either abortion or euthanasia in hell. In fact, some contemporary Christians do not believe that hell exists at all. They may believe that God will eventually forgive everyone and all will enter heaven, or that hell is symbolic of separation from God.

Atheists and humanists believe that any idea of the afterlife should be rejected. They adopt an approach of 'you only live once' and feel that all of our decisions should be about this life and making it as positive and pain-free as it can be. They feel that making decisions based upon the afterlife is foolish as heaven and hell are not real and there is no life after death.