

## True or False?

You may have heard of the phrase “**a persons’ moral compass**”. It means the set of principles by which a person develops their own sense of what is right and what is wrong (that is, their own moral and ethical code). We all know right from wrong (though some people do stray, unfortunately). But where did we acquire that knowledge? It is often argued that the moral compass is built on religious doctrines (e.g., the 10 commandments in Christian religions). But is that really true? Is it also possible to be a good person by following ideas that do not come from a religion? This short series of true/false statements are designed to prompt some discussion on this point.

### Your tasks

1. Read through each statement and decide which you think are true and which you think are false. Your answers should be based on what you currently know rather than what you can find by research on the internet.
2. Give example for each statement that you believe to be true.
3. Do likewise for each statement that you believe to be false.



### The true/false statements

1. *People have different worldviews and ideas about how to live a good life.*
2. *Religious and non-religious philosophies can differ about what is a good life.*
3. *Some ideas about how to live a good life are widely shared, despite different worldviews.*
4. *Some other ideas about how to live a good life are not shared.*
5. *Both religious and non-religious philosophies like secular humanism can inspire positive social action.*
6. *Religious and non-religious philosophies can be used to inspire negative social action.*
7. *Some people experience unfair advantages or disadvantages because of their religion, or lack of religious belief.*
8. *Religions usually look to God or gods as the source of moral authority.*
9. *Non-religious philosophies, like secular humanism, look to humans and scientific evidence as the source of moral authority.*

### **Module 1: Student resource 1.1**

These same questions will also form part of the slideshow for this module. You will have the chance to discuss your answers with others in your class.

## Teacher's notes

All nine statements are true. Here are some examples as evidence to support that claim.

1. This is patently true. We know that some people advocate that our morals and ethics come from religious doctrine while others, such as atheists, argue that we can be good people without guidance from God.
2. Christians, for example, would say that following the 10 commandments is part of being a good person. In contrast, a secular humanist follows a set of rules that does not require observance of religious rules.
3. Both Christians and atheists would agree that living a good life would at least require us to be good to each other and that we treat each other with respect.
4. Some religions require their followers to spread the word of their faith in order to be a good person. Many religions expect a good follower to partake in special religious festivals and practices. Secular humanists maintain that it is the person's right to choose how they conduct themselves (and to be judged only by their peers for their actions, not by a god).
5. True, there is good in all people. In moments of crisis (e.g., a car accident, a fire, a flash flood) people rush to help each other without first asking what their religion or belief might be.
6. In the dark ages many women were burnt after judgements by religious courts decreed that they were a witch. Racism is an example of a non-religious philosophy that inspires negative social actions. Militant activism (e.g., PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), The Sea Sheppard foundation etc.) might be viewed as espousing non-religious

philosophies for negative social action (certainly by those that they target, perhaps not by those they defend).

7. This statement contains four possible combinations (advantage/disadvantage and religious/non-religious)
  - (unfair religious advantage) Many politicians (in the USA) will gain votes simply by being religious.
  - (unfair religious disadvantage) Religious minorities often are treated very poorly.
  - (unfair non-religious advantage) Atheists may not be subjected to the same poor treatment experienced by some religious minorities.
  - (unfair non-religious disadvantage) Some perfectly qualified teachers are excluded from some religious schools simply for being an atheist.
8. This is patently true for most religions. Though Buddhism is one notable exception.
9. This is true as it is one of the basic tenets of secular humanism. A similar statement also appears in the definition of secular humanism given on slide 5 of the classroom slideshow.